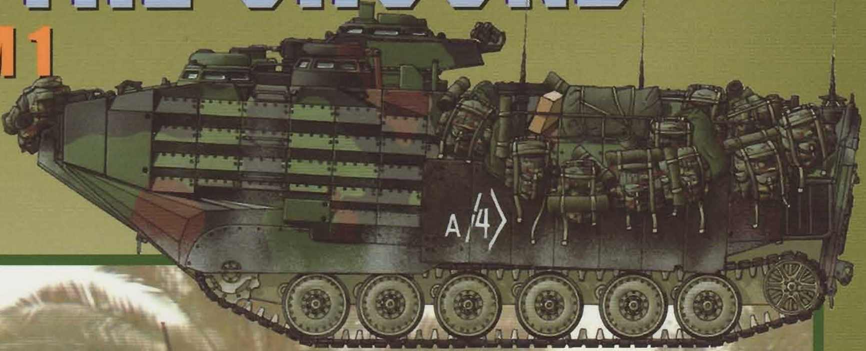
MINI COLOR SERIES 7516

MARINES ON THE GROUND

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM 1

Gordon Arthur



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OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM 1

Text by Gordon Arthur
Illustrations by Hubert Cance

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Foreword

The United States Marine Corps motto is "Semper Fidelis", Latin for "Always faithful". The Marine Corps has been faithfully serving the United States since its formation on 10 November 1775, which even predated the nation's independence! This book is a record of the Marines who fought in the quest to bring freedom to the people of Iraq. The story is best told in the accompanying photographs, most of which are official USMC photos. The Marine combat photographers who took them were right in the thick of the action, in the best position to record the shape and nuances of the battle - their work has been published here courtesy of the USMC, and individual photographers are credited where possible.

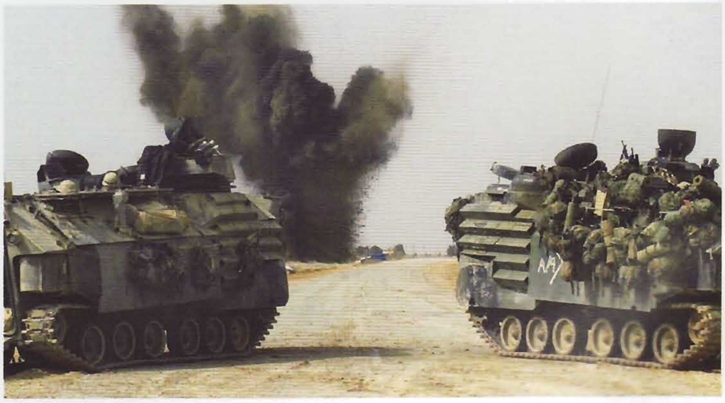
Acknowledgements

The author would like to express his sincere thanks to a couple of Marines for their assistance in preparing this book. Sgt. Brandon Wright generously offered the use of some of his photos taken during his service with an LAV unit in 2003. Likewise, Mike Mummey, MSgt USMC Ret, was most magnanimous with his outstanding assistance. His expert knowledge and eye for detail was invaluable in offering helpful suggestions and corrections while proofreading the text.

Introduction

The world watched transfixed to their TV screens as war was waged on Iraq early in 2003 by a U.S. led coalition for the second time in history. It was labeled as a new kind of warfare and it was one where Saddam Hussein was distinctly out-thought and out-fought. This war was christened Operation Iraqi Freedom (henceforth referred to as OIF). The world was constantly reminded that the aim of OIF was to end the harsh and cruel tyranny of Saddam Hussein, and his nation's ability to develop and use Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). Interestingly in Arabic, the Iraqi dictator's name means, "the one who confronts". Now the roles were reversed, and he was the one to be confronted by 'a coalition of the willing'. The campaign was to be marked by a new and hitherto unseen level of sophistication in joint warfare, combining air, land and naval forces.

An important element in this campaign was the United States Marines Corps. Marines are the point of the U.S. military spear and they were a vital component in the plan to rid Iraq of Saddam Hussein. This pictorial volume gives a précis of the role Marines played in the coalition ground campaign, starting from the buildup in Kuwait through to the fall of Iraq's totalitarian regime. The focus is on their armored and soft-skinned vehicles and hopefully this chronicle highlights some of the remarkable achievements of the USMC. The book's scope is confined to OIF 1, for subsequent volumes will cover later Marine deployments to Iraq.



Marines watch from the cover of their AAV7A1 "Tuna Boats" as captured 120mm mortars and ammunition are destroyed in a controlled explosion on 30 March 2003. These members of Alpha Company, 1/4 (1st Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment), RCT-1 (Regimental Combat Team 1), found the weapons in an Iraqi military truck in Al Fajr. The AAV (Assault Amphibian Vehicle), an Amphibious Tractor or "Amtrac", is designed primarily for amphibious operations, not deep inland assaults, but Marines made do with this vehicle despite its shortcomings regarding its large size and limited armor protection. (USMC)

Planning and Preparations

The two main players in the coalition facing Iraq's persistent defiance of United Nations sanctions were the United States and the United Kingdom. Coalition air forces had long been degrading Iraqi air defenses under the auspices of Operation Southern Watch, protecting the no-fly zones in northern and southern Iraq. According to the 'Rumsfeld Policy', as it is called by some, the coalition plan called for as few forces as possible to conduct this war against Iraq, and thus the coalition employed about 340,000 troops[1], of which a remarkably high proportion were Special Forces. Most of the initial successes were to come from a mere 130,000 forward deployed troops, which was indeed a daring strategy, as follow-up units 'flowed' into the region as required.

The principal American assault divisions involved were the 3rd ID (Infantry Division), the 101st Airborne Division and the 1st MarDiv (Marine Division). Initially it was planned that the 4th ID, the United States' most technologically advanced unit, would open up a northern front by attacking south from Turkey. However, after the Turkish parliament refused to give the USA permission for basing rights in their territory, this option had to be abandoned. In any event, the USA kept the division's equipment waiting aboard ships in the Mediterranean Sea until as late as possible. This threat of a northern front was deemed serious enough for Iraq to keep eleven of its seventeen regular army divisions in place to counter any 4th ID attack from Turkey.

The key to the plan revolved around two long armored columns that would attack 480km north from Kuwait towards Baghdad, the jugular vein of the

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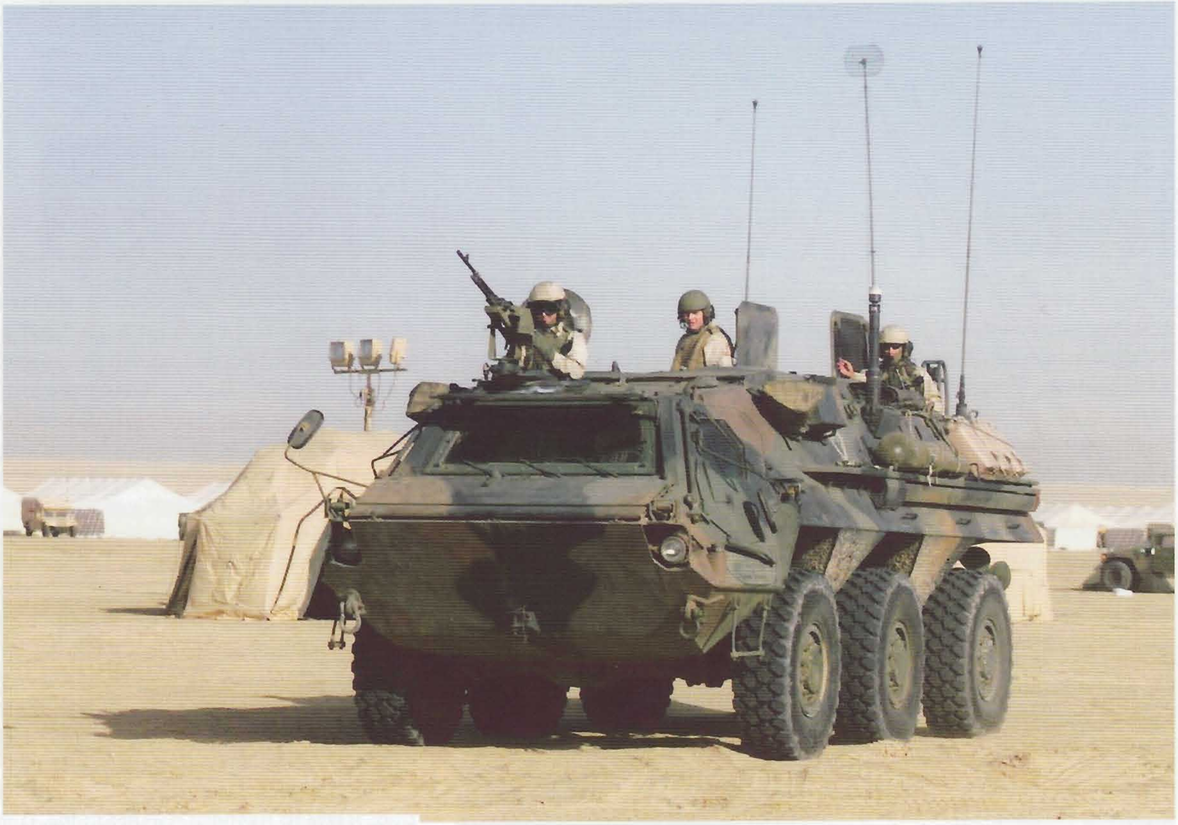
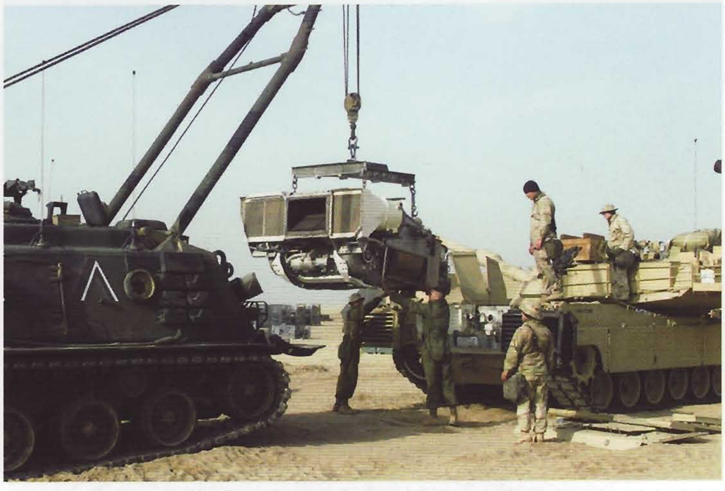
[1] This total includes ground, air and naval troops. These were not all stationed in Iraq itself, but supported the operation from within the region. This total includes personnel as far away as Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean where long-range bombers were based.

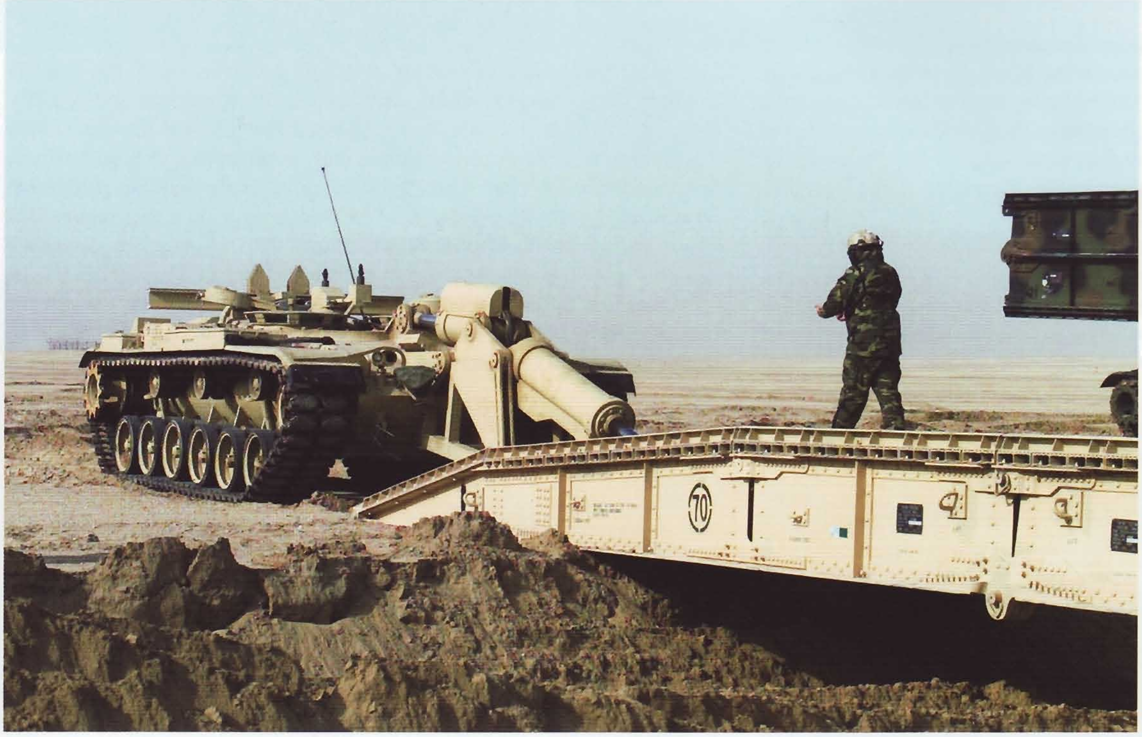


This is an M93A1 Fox, a German manufactured armored vehicle used for detecting battlefield nuclear and chemical contaminants. It is regarded as the best of its type in the world. This vehicle is attached to the 7th Marine Regiment, also known as TF (Task Force) Ripper. Shown erected is the meteorological sensor, which measures air and ground temperature, wind speed and direction, and relative humidity. At the front right is a 7.62mm M240 machine gun, and an M250 smoke grenade launcher is positioned on each side. Foxes were a I MEF (Marine Expeditionary Force) asset that were then assigned to subordinate units. (Sgt. Paul L. Anstine II, USMC)

A small portion of the equipment staged at an ERP (Equipment Reception Point) after being unloaded by Marines and sailors from MPF (Maritime Pre-positioned Force) ships in Kuwait in early February 2003. Vehicles include 250cc motorcycles, a variety of Humvees, and 7-ton MTVR (Medium Tactical Vehicle Replacement) trucks. They await troops from the 5th Marine Regiment to pick them up when they fly into theater. (GySgt. Erik S. Hansen, USMC)



In early February 2003, at Camp Ripper in Kuwait, tank mechanics of 1st Tank Battalion re-install an engine/transmission "pack" into an Alpha Company M1A1 Abrams. They are using the A-frame boom winch of an M88A1 VTR (Vehicle, Tracked, Recovery). This hoist winch is capable of lifting 25 tons, more than enough to lift an M1A1 power pack. 1st Tanks was attached to TF Ripper for OIF. (Sgt. Paul L. Anstine II, USMC)



Training in preparation for OIF, an M60A1 AVLB (Armored Vehicle Launched Bridge) from H&S (Headquarters and Service) Company, 1st Tank Battalion, launches its 60-foot scissors-type bridge across a simulated anti-tank ditch at Camp Ripper in northern Kuwait on 8 February. The bridge can be deployed in as little as two to five minutes, and recovered from either end in less than ten minutes. The bridge pictured can support Class 70-ton vehicles, as shown by the circled "70" bridge classification sign on the side. The entire Army and Marine AVLB fleet started the campaign with an operational readiness rate of 94%, but this dropped precipitously upon crossing the Line of Departure (LD). Only fourteen of the fifty-one systems fielded arrived in Baghdad. (LCpl. Kevin C. Quihuis Jr., USMC)

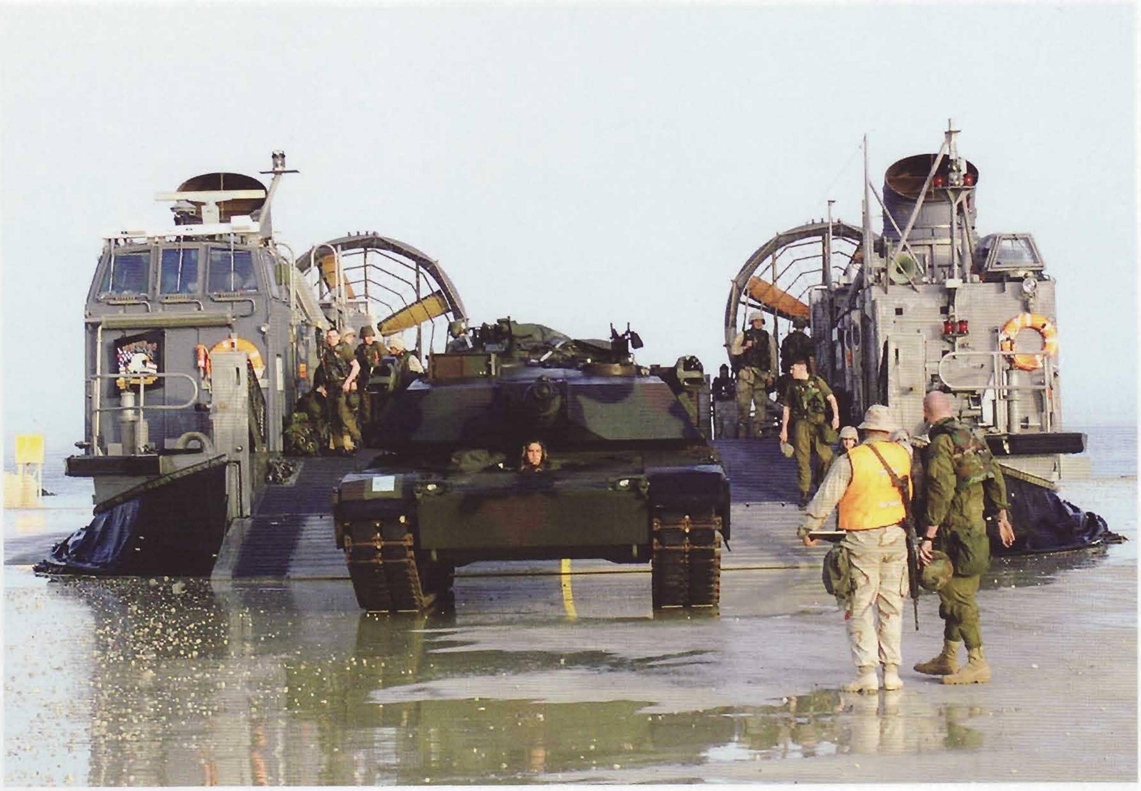
ruling dictatorship. The left hand column traveling west of the Euphrates River was made up of V Corps, composed principally of the 3rd ID, with the right hand column traveling east of the River formed by I MEF (Marine Expeditionary Force). These two columns traveling in parallel would snake north to eventually join their interlocking fingers around the throbbing neck of Baghdad in a pincer movement. Meanwhile, the plan also called for Marines and British forces to initially secure the vital Rumaylah oilfields in the south to prevent the kind of destruction and fires that occurred in the 1991 Gulf War. The British would then peel off to take the southern city of Basra, Iraq's second largest city, and occupy the Al Faw peninsular and so protect the right flank of the swift American advance, acting as an anchor. This opening gambit of seizing the oilfields called for swiftness and surprise, and I MEF was given the task.

The 'Gator Navy - this name is applied to U.S. naval amphibious transport ships and boats used to transport Marine units and their equipment ('gator is short for alligator, an amphibious animal dangerous whether in or out of the water!). At Camp Patriot in Kuwait, 24th MEU (SOC) (Marine Expeditionary Unit, Special Operations Capable) personnel prepare to offload a pair of MTVRs with M198 howitzers from a Landing Craft Utility (LCU) on 29 March. The 2,200 members of this MEU and all their equipment were unloaded by LCUs or LCACs (Landing Craft, Air Cushioned) in Kuwait in preparation for their deployment into Iraq. (Journalist 1st Class Joe Krypel, U.S. Navy)

This was truly a blitzkrieg concept, for the forces would advance as fast as they could to capture Baghdad and put an end to the reigning regime, bypassing main population centers wherever possible, and by so doing, accepting a certain degree of risk to their Lines of Communication (LOCs) from bypassed enemy units. By steering clear of population centers, the American forces hoped to avoid unnecessary delays or allow Iraqi forces to maximize their advantages in built-up areas. For the Marines a key to their advance was a strategic pair of bridges in the city of An Nasiriyah that would allow them to cross the Euphrates River. One prong would race north from An Nasiriyah to Al Kut on Highway 7, while the larger prong would move northwest along Route 1 before abruptly veering right at Highway 27 to converge on An Numaniyah. Having two attack avenues not only reduced traffic congestion, but also hedged against setbacks on either of the routes. The USMC drive north between the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers from An Nasiriyah would enable them to bypass towns and Iraqi forces arrayed further east, and then to exploit Highway 6 beyond Al Kut north of the Tigris River straight to the gates of Baghdad. The historic and obvious route for the Marines would have been straight up Highway 6 from Basra to Baghdad parallel to the Tigris River, and five regular Iraqi divisions guarded this avenue of approach. Indeed I MEF initially feinted towards Basra, before turning west and north, leaving the five divisions north of the Tigris out of the fight. The Marine route also split the seams between two Republican Guard units nearer Baghdad and forced these elite divisions to redeploy in the face of total coalition air dominance. This prevented them from enjoying the advantage of prepared defensive positions.

The speed and direction of the advance was to constantly cause Iraqi units to reposition themselves to face each new threat in a piecemeal fashion, and whenever they did so they were exposed to terrifying air attacks that decimated whole divisions, and seriously degraded their capabilities. Widespread use of Special Forces in the northern and western regions in particular would also add their weight to the attack by tackling specific threats such as missiles and chemical and biological warfare weapons storage sites.

This evolutionary war saw many new developments. Emblematic of this was the fact that the largest coalition ground contingent came not from the Army, but from the Marine Corps. I MEF consisted of nearly 60,000 troops under the command of Lieutenant General James T. Conway. The major component of the MEF was the 1st MarDiv, commanded by Major General Mattis, and he would take his amphibious troops all the way to



This M1A1 belongs to the 2nd MEB (Marine Expeditionary Brigade), and is seen here offloading from an LCAC belonging to Assault Craft Unit 4 (ACU-4). It lands on a Kuwait beach on 15 February as part of the buildup for OIF. With a maximum 75-ton payload, an LCAC can only transport one M1A1 tank at a time, though it can maintain a speed of up to 50 knots (91km/h) with a range of 328nm (607km). Once ashore, 2nd MEB would be organized as TF Tarawa. (Photographer's Mate 3rd Class Angel Roman-Otero, U.S. Navy)

Baghdad in the longest Marine land attack in nearly 200 years. In Iraq I MEF covered a total of 808km between the Line of Departure (LD) and its farthest point north. In fact, during the twenty-two days of sustained combat in OIF, the 1st MarDiv carried out the longest sequence of coordinated attacks in the history of the Marine Corps. MEUs (Marine Expeditionary Unit)[2] are not designed for sustained inland advances or combat that is distant from the coastline. Therefore the Army supplied over 2,700 essential support personnel in capabilities that Marine units do not normally have. These included amongst others a Patriot missile brigade, an engineer group including three bridge companies, an MP battalion, an NBC defense battalion, an air medical evacuation company, a Psyop (Psychological Operations) battalion, and a corps support group.

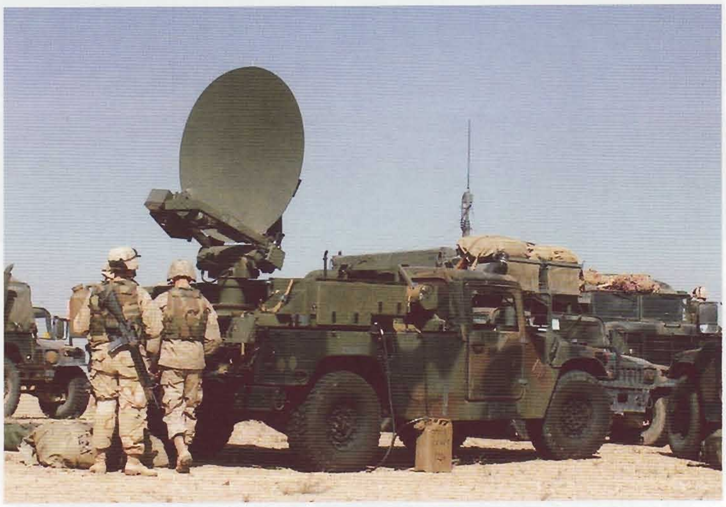
The 1st MarDiv was alerted to prepare for combat in the summer of 2002, and training and command post and field exercises for a possible Iraq invasion began in July 2002 at Camp Pendleton and Twentynine Palms in California. Command elements were deployed to Kuwait in October to make preparations for the later arrival of the main body. By December 2002 the various units in the USA were honed and ready to go, and embarkation to the U.S. CENTCOM (Central Command) theater occurred in January and February of 2003. Exercises and training continued in the Kuwaiti desert through to mid-March.

I MEF included the 1st MarDiv, the 15th MEU from the west coast of the USA, and the 2nd MEB (Marine Expeditionary Brigade) from the east coast. A MEF COC (Combat Operations Center) was established at Camp Commando, which served as the main Marine HQ. The MAGTF (Marine Air Ground Task Force) included:

- four infantry regiments
- two artillery regiments
- three Light Armored Reconnaissance (LAR) battalions
- two tank battalions, plus one reservist tank company (with TF Tarawa)
- one Force Service Support Group (FSSG) providing logistics
- three Marine Aircraft Groups (with around 400 aircraft)
- an additional logistics command

The 1st MarDiv was organized into three mechanized Regimental Combat Teams – RCT-1, RCT-5 and RCT-7.

It was estimated that about 67% of the USMC's global operational forces were deployed in the Iraq theatre. A total of eleven ships from two MPS (Maritime Pre-positioned Ship) squadrons[3] conducted a major sealift to bring most of the troops' equipment into the theater. Normally it would take 20-25 days to offload this amount of cargo, but it was accomplished in just sixteen days. All 60,000 Marines arrived in Kuwait within the space of 45 days. The 'Leathernecks' of I MEF were stationed in the eastern region of Kuwait while the Army's 3rd ID was to the west. In Kuwait the Marines were stationed at Camps Arifjan, Commando, Coyote, Fox, Grizzly, Matilda, Peleliu, Ripper, Ryan, and Shoup. The USMC deployed approximately 138 M1A1 tanks, and two to three times that number of LAVs (Light Armored Vehicles) and AAVs (Amphibious Armored Vehicles).



These Marine "Muxsters" link up their MUX (Microwave Multiplexing) dish mounted on a Humvee chassis during a training exercise north of Kuwait City on 14 February. Multiplexing combines all communication, internet and telephone signals into one signal, before satellite transmitters bounce the signal off the troposphere 46,000 feet above the earth. The training exercise gave these "Comm" Marines practice relocating the Regimental Main Command Operations Center with all its communications gear. (GySgt. Erik S. Hansen, USMC)

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[2] - An MEU is a self-contained ground-naval-air task force acting as a rapid response unit. Each MEU can put ashore and sustain a Battalion Landing Team, a battalion-sized landing force of approximately 1,000 men, plus support personnel.

[3] - MPS squadrons were established as permanent Marine units in 1981. Their purpose was to pre-position equipment near potential trouble spots, so that troops just needed to fly in, pick up their equipment and were then ready for combat.

A forklift unloads materials from a MK48-14 LVS (Logistic Vehicle System) belonging to CSSC-115 (Combat Service Support Company) at Camp Grizzly (RCT-5) in Kuwait. This truck has a roof-mounted M66 ring mount but no armament is fitted. The LVS is a variation of the Army's HEMTT series of ten-ton 8x8 trucks. The LVS was first fielded with Marine units in the mid-1980s. The vehicle fleet is now beginning to show its age and is nearing the end of its service life. (Sgt. Kevin R. Reed, USMC)

By 16 March all the key units were in place and ready to move north to liberate the Iraqi people. Marines also had two Amphibious Task Forces in the Gulf, including the 15th MEU that was tasked with capturing the Al Faw peninsular and its vital oil terminal infrastructure. Oil was not the primary consideration in this war, but with Iraq having the second largest easily accessible oil reserves, the capture of an intact oil infrastructure would be crucial in Iraq's future financial and civil security.

G-Day ('G' representing the Ground assault) had been set earlier than A-Day ('A' denoting the Air campaign) to achieve complete tactical surprise over the Iraqis, and to prevent Iraqi destruction of the oilfields. Even more remarkable was the fact that G-Day was set even before all the necessary forces had arrived in theater, relying on troops to flow in at the correct time where needed. The date set for G-Day was 20 March and A-Day was 21 March. Unlike the previous Gulf War, there was no long aerial bombing campaign softening up the opposition ahead of the war's ground phase. The attack by V Corps was considered the main line of attack, with the Marines acting as the supporting attack along Highways 1 and 7. The Route 1 highway was not complete in the southern section, with bridges and culverts down, so combat engineers were kept busy keeping the road serviceable. The highways also passed along a river delta, terrain not well suited to off-road maneuvering. It was estimated that these two routes were essentially brigade-sized avenues of approach, but the USMC required that they carry a reinforced division!

SGT MULHALL
BMI

This is an M9 ACE (Armored Combat Earthmover), an engineering vehicle used in berm breaching missions along the Kuwait-Iraq border at the commencement of OIF. This particular vehicle belongs to 1st Platoon, Bravo Company, 1st CEB (Combat Engineer Battalion), and is practicing the removal of border fencing at a training range in TAA (Tactical Assembly Area) Coyote in northern Kuwait. The ACE is an effective piece of equipment but it had trouble keeping up with maneuver battalions because of its limited 48km/h top speed on paved roads. There were a number of cases of hydraulics bursting, causing ACEs to be left behind along the line of advance. (Sgt. Kevin R. Reed, USMC)

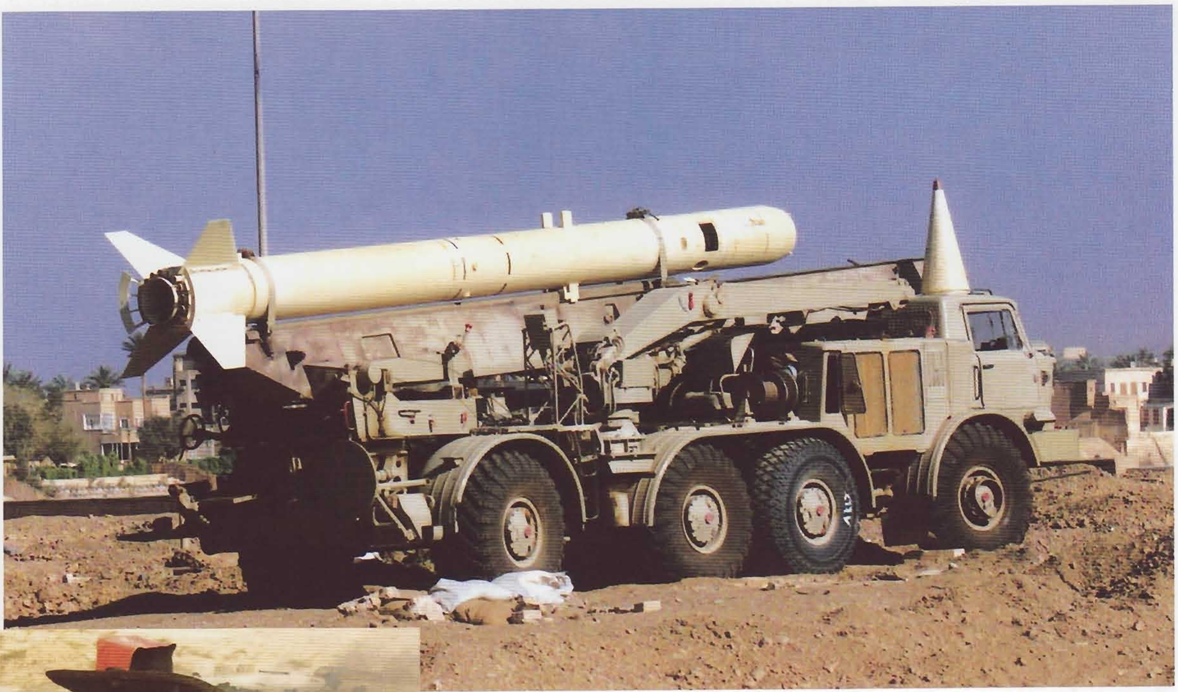
Iraqi Forces

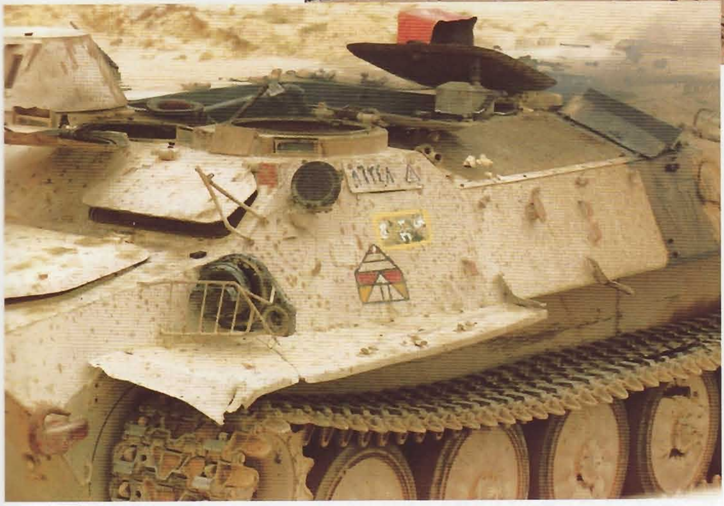
Facing the coalition were about 400,000 Iraqi regular forces in units of varying quality. The best were the six Republican Guard Divisions (three were armored and three were motorized infantry) boasting 70,000 soldiers. This force was much smaller than the army that faced the coalition in the first Gulf War, when Iraq had the fourth biggest army in the world. Years of sanctions and coalition enforced 'no-fly' zones had seriously depleted the combat effectiveness of Saddam's armed forces. Now it was estimated they had perhaps 2,000 tanks (including 700 T-72s), 4,000 APCs and light tanks, 6,000 AA guns, and 2,000 self-propelled artillery pieces. The Iraqi Air Force had possibly 300 modern fighters, but Saddam chose to hide these on the ground, so they did not contest the skies at all during the campaign.

There was also an estimated 25 - 40,000 *Fedayeen Saddam* ("Saddam's Martyrs") paramilitaries. This organization was founded in 1995 by Uday Hussein, son of the president, though control was eventually delegated to Uday's brother Qusay. Its members were mostly young men, and though they were not particularly well trained, they were vicious fighters able to operate independently of a centralized command structure. They employed terrorist and guerilla tactics and had huge supplies of weapons and ammunition stockpiled in numerous locations such as mosques and schools.

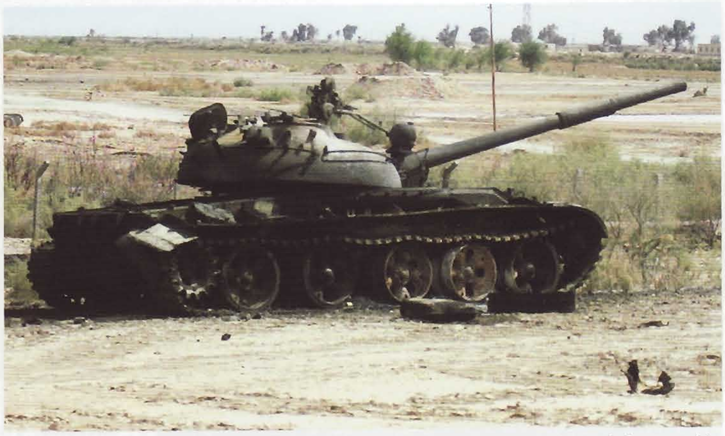
Iraqi commanders had a large proportion of their forces concentrated south of Baghdad and the Marines had to keep them in place, to tie them down, so that the main Army effort in the west could get to Baghdad as quickly as possible. By attacking along two main avenues, the Marines prevented Iraqi forces from concentrating their combat power against them as they could have if there had been only one axis of advance. The Marines' use of these tandem routes diverted critical Iraqi divisional units from defending Baghdad, all the while overcoming those who chose to stand and fight them along the way.

This FROG-7 (Free Rocket Over Ground) Iraqi missile system was captured by 1/5 Marines, RCT-5, at a presidential compound in Baghdad. This type of missile could fire a 55kg warhead up to a distance of 70km. There were serious concerns that Saddam Hussein would unleash WMD (Weapons of Mass Destruction) against coalition troops using these and similar rockets. Special Forces were very active in the western desert to prevent Iraq from firing missiles or rockets against coalition targets or Israel, as occurred in the 1991 Gulf War. (Sgt. Kevin R. Reed, USMC)

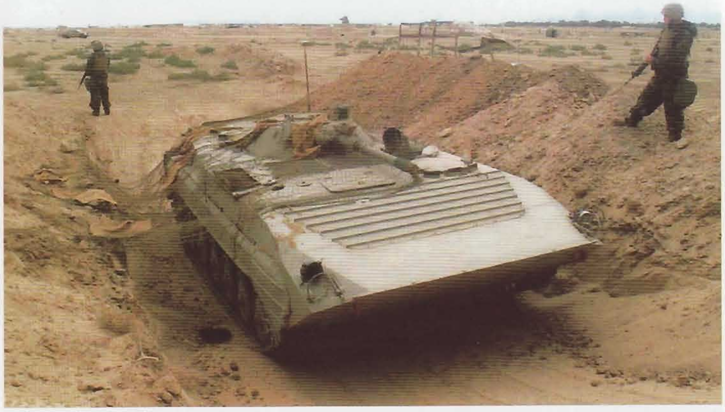




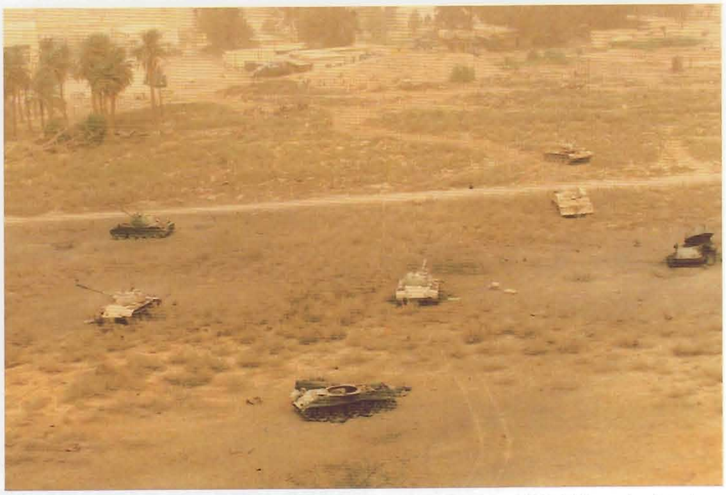
This MT-LB multi-purpose tracked vehicle was destroyed on 22 March by Charlie Company of 1st Tank Battalion near the town of At Tubah. The MT-LB was one of the most common APCs (Armored Personnel Carrier) used by Iraq, and this one bears some unit markings. Capable of carrying eleven soldiers, it can also tow artillery howitzers or anti-tank guns. MT-LBs have a top speed of 61.5km/h on land and 5km/h in water. (Sgt. Paul L. Anstine II, USMC)



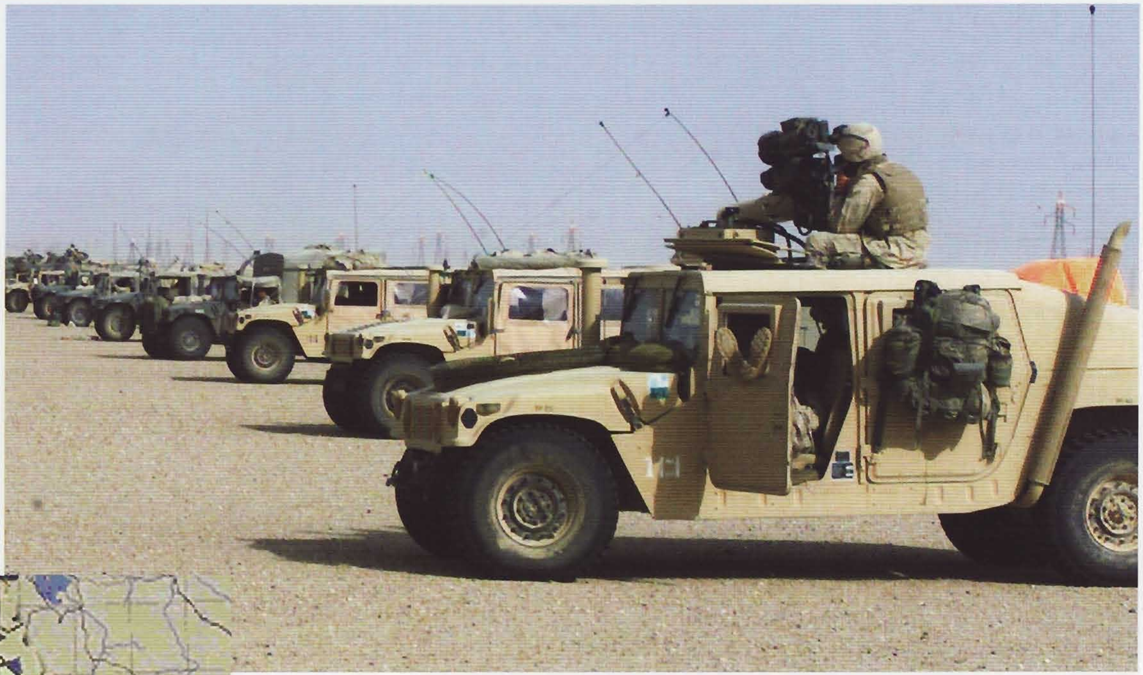
The blackened, burnt out hulk of an Iraqi T-62 lies at the side of the road in a photo taken on 13 April. Hundreds of similar wrecks littered the Iraqi countryside, testament to the massive firepower wielded by the coalition. The Iraqi Army also fielded a very limited number of older Western vehicles such as M48, M60, AMX30, Centurion and Chieftain tanks, some of which had been captured from Iran and Kuwait. When employed, they were dug into static positions outside military bases or police stations. (SSgt. Bryan P. Reed, USMC)



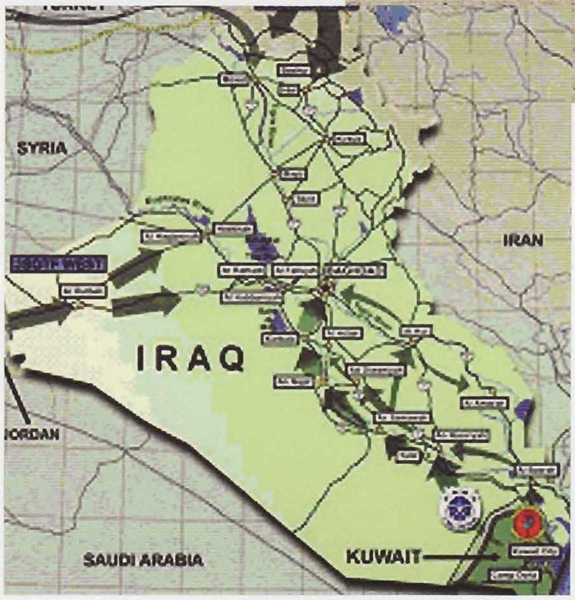
This Iraqi BMP-2 is parked in a revetment and is being examined by Marines on 22 March. Since the vehicle has no visible damage, it is likely the crew either surrendered or abandoned it, as often happened in the battle for Iraq. Iraq had around 1,200 BMP-1 and BMP-2 vehicles, but it is estimated only 900 were operational. The BMP-2 has a fully rotating turret containing a 30mm cannon that can be elevated up to 75¢X for firing at helicopters or low-flying aircraft. (GySgt. Erik S. Hansen, USMC)



This is an aerial shot of an Iraqi military complex west of Ad Diwaniyah taken on 16 April. Destroyed Iraqi vehicles and T-55 tanks litter the grounds after being overwhelmed by the rapid advance and superior application of combined arms firepower by the Marines. (MSgt. Buzz Farrell, USMC)



Vehicles of Communications Platoon, H&S Co, 1st Tank Battalion, are lined up in their DA (Dispersal Area) near the Kuwaiti border shortly before receiving the order to advance north into Iraq. This photo was taken a few hours before G-Day, 20 March. The vehicle nearest the camera is one of the M1045 AT TOW (Anti-Tank Tube-launched Optically-tracked Wire-guided) missile carriers that provided security for the battalion's command vehicles. The mobility and speed of the HMMWV make it an ideal platform for the anti-tank TOW system. (Sgt. Paul L. Anstine II, USMC)



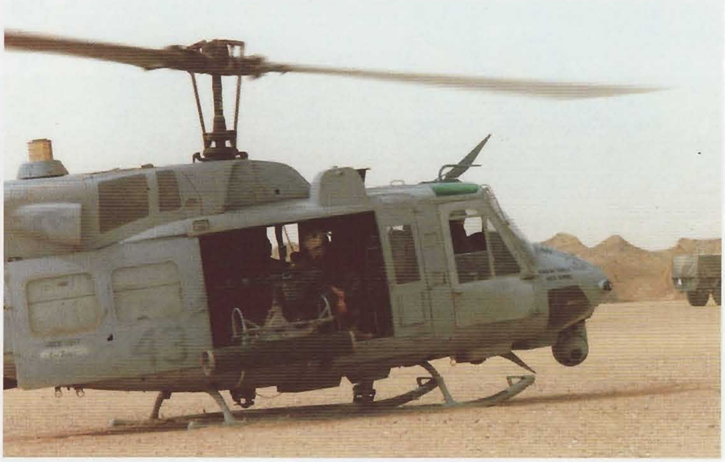
Main lines of attack towards Baghdad in OIF. (Source: U. S Department of Defense)

What follows is a day-by-day account of the campaign to rid Iraq of its ruler. The chronology's focus is maintained on the actions of the Marines, but to help give an overall sense of the campaign, occasional mention is made of what was happening elsewhere. The importance of the coalition air campaign in targeting enemy troop concentrations and providing Close Air Support (CAS) cannot be overestimated. Throughout the campaign a total of 41,404 air sorties were conducted by the coalition, as opposed to zero for the Iraqis.[4] In total the coalition dropped 19,269 precision-guided munitions, plus 9,251 unguided bombs. It was this massive airpower and total dominance of the skies that provided the right conditions for ground forces to advance so rapidly.

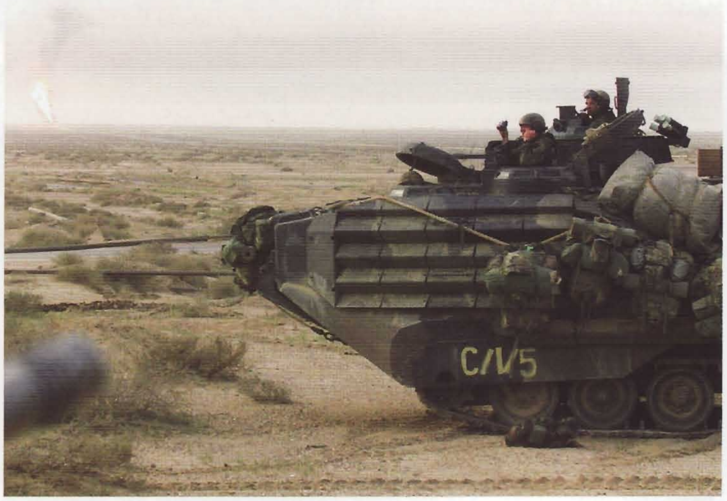
Tuesday 18 March

Units such as the 7,503-man RCT-5, TF "Grizzly", moved up to occupy attack positions adjacent to the sand berms along the Iraq-Kuwait border under the guise of a training exercise. These large earth berms, along with tank ditches, electric fences and concertina wire had been erected by coalition forces the full length of the border after the first Gulf War. Along the border was a series of Iraqi outposts. Final preparations and checks were made as members of the 1st Marine Division, "Blue Diamond", prepared for war.

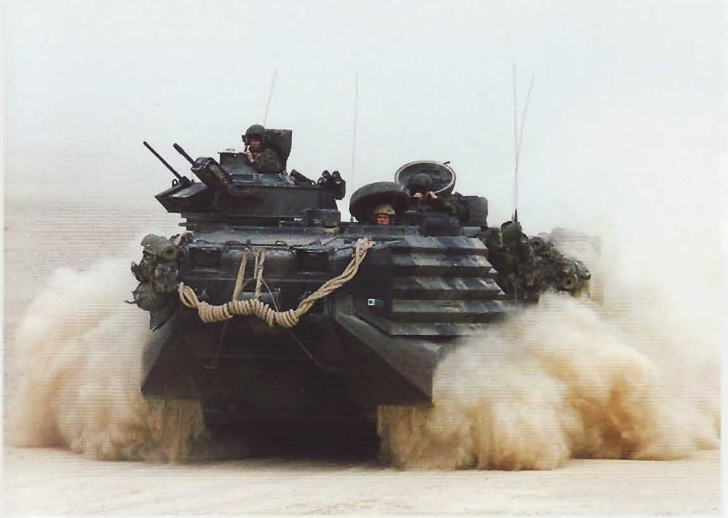
[4] - Of this total, 38,358 were generated by American planes, 93% of the total.



On G-Day the crew of this UH-1N helicopter from HMLA-269 performs preflight checks prior to taking off in support of the ground assault in southern Iraq. This "Huey" has a rocket launcher pod for seven 2.75" rockets door-mounted on either side. The Bell-Textron UH-1N made its Marine Corps debut way back in 1971 and remains in service mainly as a utility or command and control platform. The UH-1N is powered by a pair of Pratt and Whitney turboshaft engines, each rated at 900hp. (LCpl. Jennifer Krusen, USMC)



After the first phase of entering into Iraq, this unit from Charlie Company, 1/5 Marines (note the markings "C/1/5"), RCT-5, takes a temporary halt. This AAVP7A1 was photographed on 21 March, while an oil well blazes in the background. Personal gear and packs have been secured to a rope run around the hull. AAVs can travel at a speed of 72km/h on land or 13km/h in water. (Sgt. Kevin R. Reed, USMC)

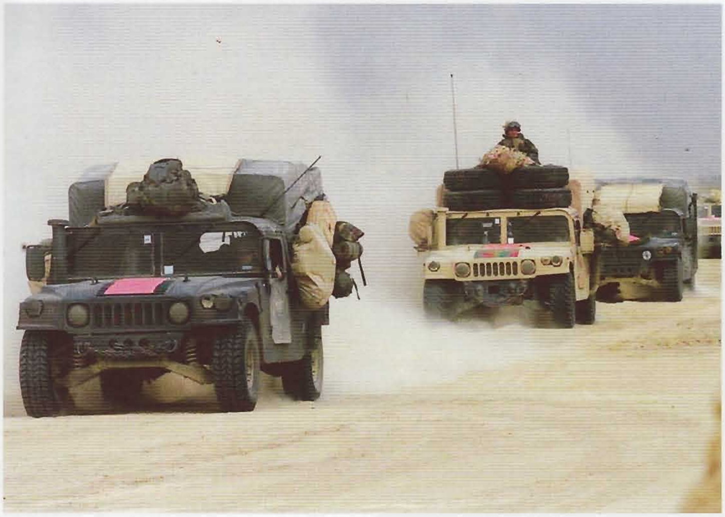


On 21 March, the second full day of OIF, this AAV causes a bow wave, not of water, but of dust, as it churns through the desert sands of northern Kuwait. The vehicle belongs to 3rd Assault Amphibian Battalion (AAB) of the 7th Marine Regiment, and is conducting a patrol on 21 March, the second full day of OIF. It is fitted with a bolt-on EAAK (Enhanced Appliqué Armor Kit) that adds some 2,000kg of weight but can defeat the Soviet KPV 14.5mm machine gun. It also offers good protection against airburst shrapnel from 155mm HE shells. (GySgt. Erik S. Hansen, USMC)

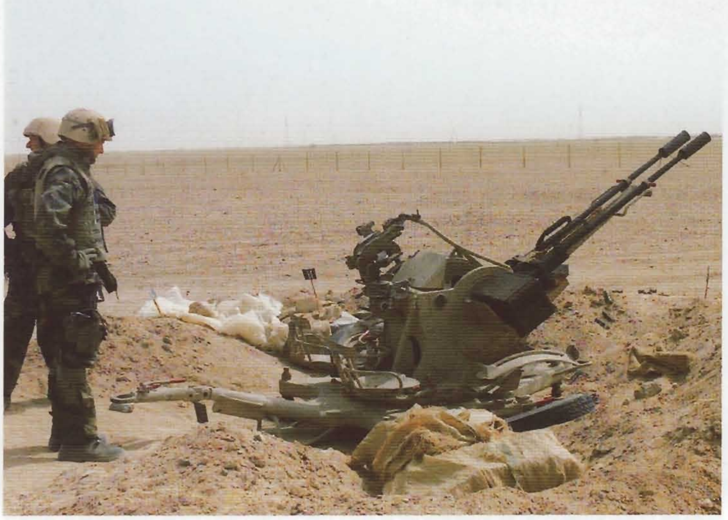
Wednesday 19 March

LAR units were conducting counter-reconnaissance and providing screening for the Marine engineers responsible for breaching the berms. The electric fence was left intact until the last moment, though the berms were breached in advance. There were intelligence reports that Iraqi soldiers were pouring into south Rumaylah, probably to sabotage the oil wells and oil production infrastructure. Because of alarm about such destruction, the first ground unit to cross into Iraq was 1/5 Marines, which were given an order at 1930 hours to cross over the border. Thus they began crossing nine hours earlier than other ground units. At 2100 hours, 2nd Tank Battalion led RCT-5 through the breaches in the 10km-wide obstacle belt and into southern Iraq. Forces were vulnerable as they bunched up to pass single file through the various crossing points.

2/5 Marines and 2nd Tanks raced through the westernmost breach towards the northern oilfields and to establish a blocking position on the Saddam Canal. 3/5 Marines took GOSPs (Gas Oil Separation Plants) 1 and 2, while 1/5 took GOSPs 3 and 4. All the objectives were taken in rapid succession.



These soft-back Humvees are loaded up with supplies and equipment, including four spare tires on the second vehicle. They belong to 3/7 Marines and were photographed in the border area between Kuwait and Iraq. The leading HMMWV is a two-door M998 cargo and troop carrier version. Some Marines refer to these cargo bed vehicles as 'floppybacks'. (GySgt. Erik S. Hansen, USMC)



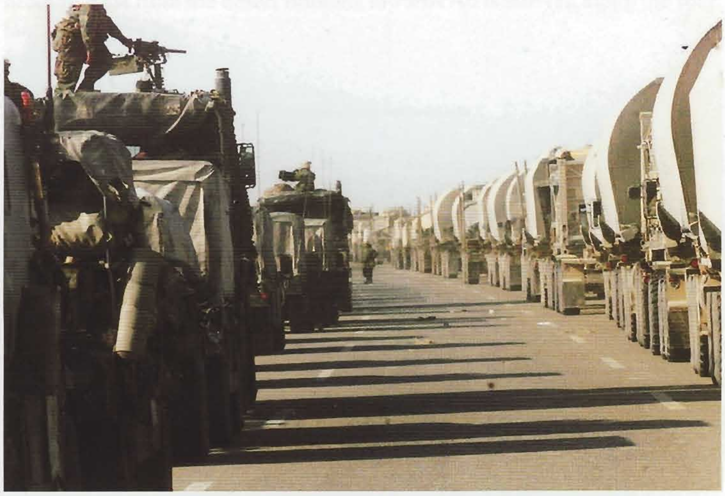
This towed ZU-23-2 anti-aircraft gun was captured by Delta Company of 1st LAR Battalion during a patrol near the border with Kuwait on 21 March. The towed ZU-23 has twin 23mm cannons mounted on a two-wheeled carriage. It weighs just 950kg and requires a crew of five to operate effectively. (LCpl. Andrew P. Roufs, USMC)

By dawn they had consolidated their positions and were ready to move forward again.

Thursday 20 March

According to a CIA intelligence source, Saddam Hussein's location on the night of the 19-20th had been pinpointed. After a meeting with his national security team, the U.S. President elected to seize this opportunity to conduct a decapitation strike against the Iraqi leader right at the outset. This resulted in bombs dropped by USAF F-117 stealth fighters and cruise missiles fired from Navy ships falling on selected targets around Baghdad at 5:30 a.m. On the same day, U.S. time, President George W. Bush addressed his nation and announced the commencement of OIF. As it turned out, the CIA report about the Iraqi president's location proved incorrect.

Soon 50,000 other Marines of I MEF were crossing into Iraq from Kuwait at a number of points along the border on G-Day, the planned ground assault day. The Marines were to the east of the simultaneous assault of 3rd ID, though Marine elements of Task Force Tarawa (TF Tarawa) crossed



On 21 March, halted convoys line Highway 1, the main road that heads from Basra to Baghdad. On the right is a row of LVS MK48-18 Ribbon Bridge Transporters that were deemed essential for crossing such major waterways as the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers. Manufactured by Oshkosh, the LVS is equipped with a four-speed automatic transmission for its 445hp liquid-cooled, turbocharged diesel engine, and it has an operational range of 725km. The FPU (Front Power Unit) is attached via an articulation joint to an RBU (Rear Body Unit), which can be a cargo bed trailer, cargo bed with crane, wrecker, or ribbon bridge variant. (LCpl. Andreas A. Plaza, USMC)

This M198 howitzer of Sierra battery, BLT (Battalion Landing Team) 2/1, 15th MEU, is providing supporting fires from its position on Kuwait's Bubiyan Island in the northern Persian Gulf. The Canoneer, or "Gun Bunny", yanks the lanyard, sending a projectile whistling downrange towards an Iraqi target in support of the ground assault on 21 March. At times during intense bombardments, the gun crews poured water over the red-hot chambers of their smoking howitzers to help cool them. (LCpl. Matthew J. Decker, USMC)

over in the vicinity of 3rd ID. They were to secure An Nasiriyah's important bridges. Artillery Marines of RCT-7 "Ripper" poured a withering artillery barrage onto Iraqi observation and communication posts atop the 444-foot high Safwan Hill, near where the ceasefire with Coalition Forces had been signed twelve years earlier. As the fighting commenced, it was discovered that surprisingly few Iraqi tanks were occupied. Instead, many were lined up neatly in tactical formation, some with their crews standing alongside surrendering, begging for American cigarettes, or holding out wads of now worthless Iraqi cash to Marines!

Iraqis fired a Seersucker cruise missile into Kuwait where it impacted 600 yards from Camp Commando, the HQ of I MEF, without causing any injuries. Marines engaged and destroyed elements of the Iraqi 51st Mechanized Division as they cleared the oilfields. A Marine CH-46E Sea Knight helicopter crashed in Kuwaiti territory 14km south of the Iraqi border while flying back to base after its first mission. All twelve American and British troops on board were killed in this non-combat related accident, the first coalition fatalities of the war. Special Forces were busy conducting covert missions in support of the main assault at numerous locations around Iraq, especially in the north and west.

This is an IFAV (Interim Fast Attack Vehicle), an upgraded Benz G-Wagen, belonging to the Force Reconnaissance Detachment of the 15th MEU. The crew takes aim at possible targets close to the UN complex near Umm Qasr. Mounted on the rear of the vehicle is an M2 HB (Heavy Barrel) .50-cal machine gun, while a shoulder-launched AT-4 anti-tank weapon is lashed to the vehicle's side. The IFAV is capable of speeds of up to 156km/h and it has a useful range of 857km with its 96-liter fuel tank. The picture was taken on 21 March. (LCpl. Brian L. Wickliffe, USMC)

On 21 March, Iraqis fired a Seersucker cruise missile that landed in the vicinity of I MEF HQ at Camp Commando in Kuwait. Here troops of 2/6 Marines assemble on an embankment soon after the missile impacted. They have all donned chemical protective gear that includes "gas" masks, reflecting coalition fears that Iraq would employ WMD against them. The CPOG (Chemical Protective Over-Garment) is a two-piece outer garment with a charcoal-lined inner layer. The M40 field protective masks that they wear have a replaceable filter that can be quickly screwed into either the left or right side of the face piece. It is usually installed on the opposite side to which the Marine shoulders his rifle. (Sgt. Mauricio Campino, USMC)

Friday 21 March

The 'shock and awe' aerial bombing campaign got under way in earnest on A-Day, with hundreds of planes and cruise missiles hitting strategic targets around the country.

In sporadic but intense fighting, Marines under the command of British troops[5] took control of the strategic southern port of Umm Qasr at around 4:00 p.m. The units involved were the 15th MEU and the 3rd Commando Brigade of the Royal Marines. Despite this success, intermittent fighting continued. British and American forces encircled Basra allowing only civilians to leave. With anti-tank missiles such as the new Javelin and TOWs mounted on Humvees, Marines destroyed ten T-55 tanks of the 51st

Markings on this HMMWV identify it as belonging to 3/7 Marines. The battalion is staging in its assigned DA (Dispersal Area) near Highway 80 south of the Kuwait-Iraq border on 21 March. A Marine infantry battalion normally contains about 900 men, but in wartime it can be reinforced to well over 1,200 personnel with various attachments that may include combat engineers, tanks, air defense and Amtracs. (GySgt. Erik S. Hansen, USMC)

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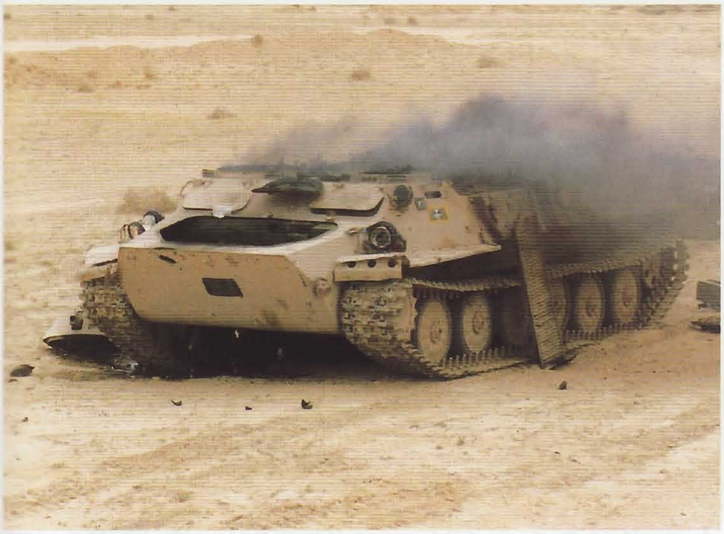
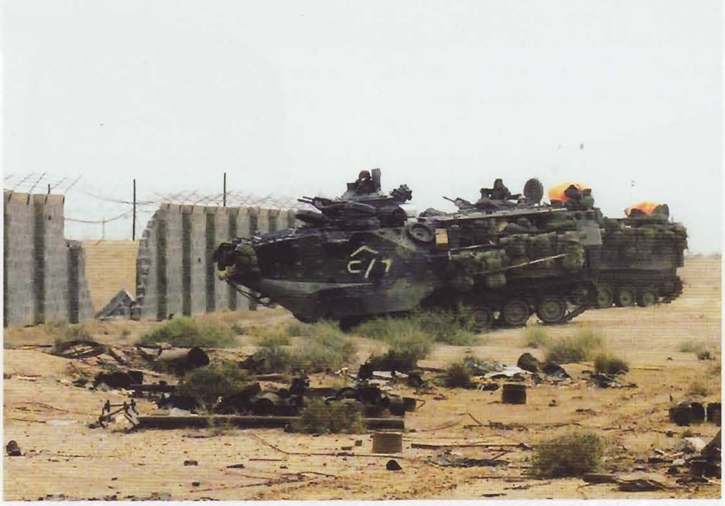
[5] - The first time American troops had served under British command since World War II.



This MT-LB was one of Charlie Company, 1st Tank Battalion's victims in southern Iraq on 22 March. Smoke still emanates from its interior and its turret lies on the left after being torn off by the force of the explosion. The MT-LB turret mounts a 7.62mm PKT machine gun and is manned by the vehicle's commander. The APC has steel armor with a maximum thickness of only 10mm, so it is no match for anti-tank weapons. (Sgt. Paul L. Anstine II, USMC)



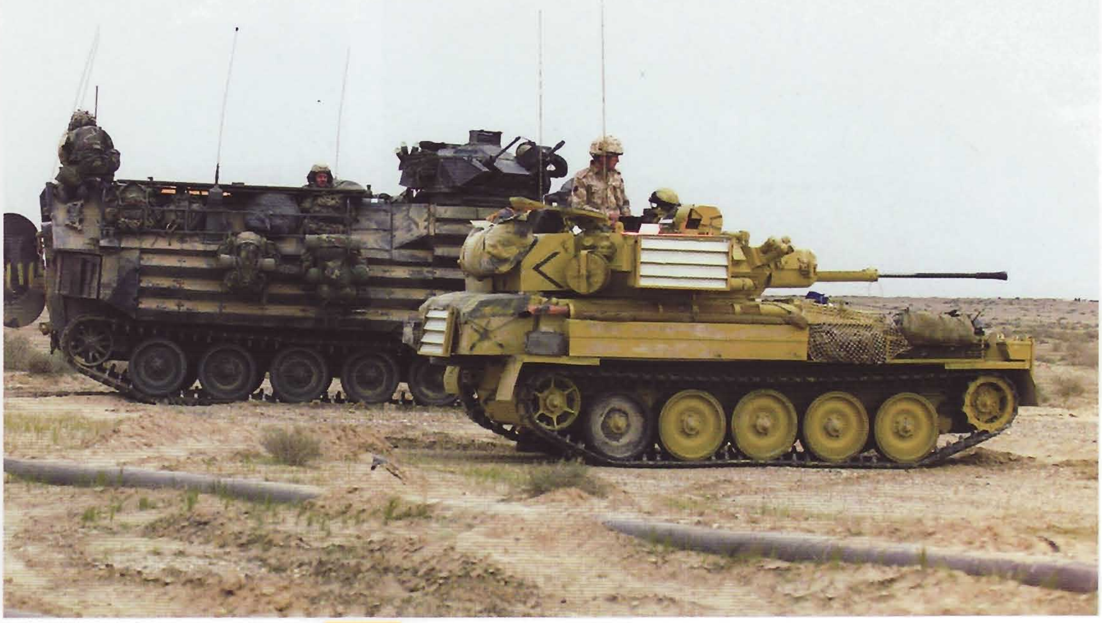
Early in the invasion, members of Charlie Company of 1/7 Marines conduct an assault by breaking through a wall around an oil pumping station in Az Zubayr in southern Iraq. This pair of AAVs wait beside the breach ready to offer covering fire if needed. Brightly colored VS-17 air identification panels are carefully positioned atop the hulls to minimize the risk of air-to-ground blue-on-blue fire. This unit captured one of the Crown Jewels, the vital Az Zubayr pumping station on 21 March. (LCpl. Kevin C Quihuis Jr, USMC)

Mechanized Division defending the oilfields. At Basra, U.S. Marines and the British 7th Armoured Brigade accepted the surrender of the Iraqi 51st Mechanized Division with its 8,000 men and 200 tanks defending the city, and they began securing the area. By 6:00 p.m. joint operations by U.S. and UK forces had secured all the vital crude oil export facilities and oilfields. In the final analysis, the Iraqis were to set fire to only nine out of 1,000 oil wells due to the swift assault. The coalition genuinely feared a repeat of the first Gulf War where Iraqis set fire to oil wells and flooded the Arabian Gulf with oil, so they made it an early priority to secure these vital facilities. Iraq fired several ballistic missiles into Kuwait. This forced troops to put on their "gas masks", rubber gloves and boots, in addition to wearing their unwieldy CPOG (Chemical Protective Over-Garment) suits. This increase in MOPP (Mission Oriented Protective Posture), which in turn degraded their operational capabilities, was a precaution in case the missiles contained chemical or biological warheads.

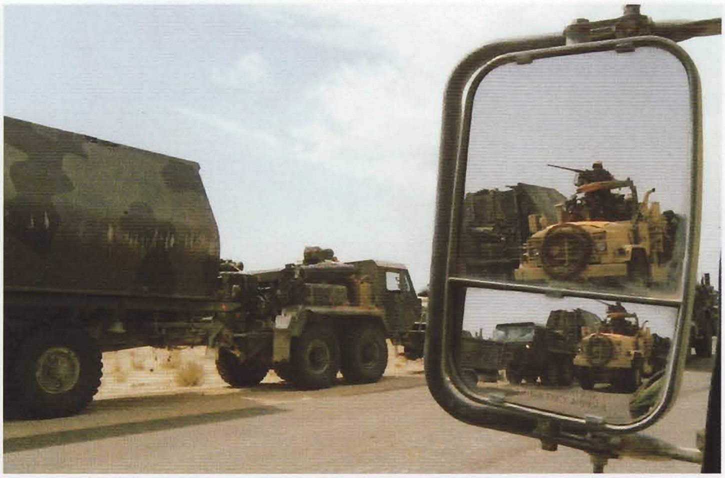
Saturday 22 March

In his first media briefing of the war, the U.S. CENTCOM commander, General Tommy Franks, stated, "This will be a campaign unlike any other in history, characterized by shock, by surprise, by flexibility and by the employment of precise munitions on a scale never before seen, and by the application of overwhelming force." This was a bold claim that was in time to prove fairly accurate. Just to illustrate the progress made so far, the 3rd ID was 240km inside Iraq and so approximately halfway to Baghdad.

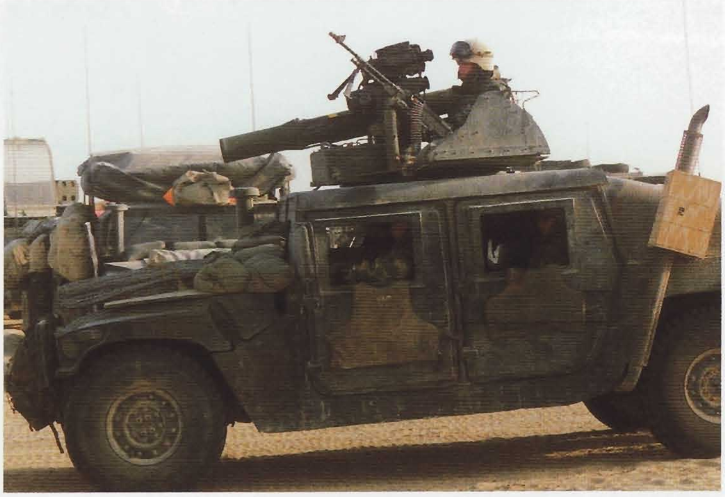
Elsewhere, Marines captured Basra International Airport west of the city against a "decent amount of resistance". After a RIP (Relief In Place) with RCT-7, British units of the 'Desert Rats' took over to mop up pockets of resistance and to finish securing Basra, as the Marines headed northwest towards Baghdad. Marine units took oil-pumping stations in the vicinity of Az Zubayr after extensive artillery and aerial strikes and a ground assault spearheaded by elements of 1st Tank Battalion. In the 1991 Gulf War it had taken 96 hours to reach the point of furthest advance, but now in 2003 it had taken a mere 32 hours to cover the same distance. By this stage Marines were exhausted after having had little sleep in the previous few days. A brief pause was then taken in order to rearm and refit before heading west from the desert oilfields towards An Nasiriyah along the four lanes of Highway 1.



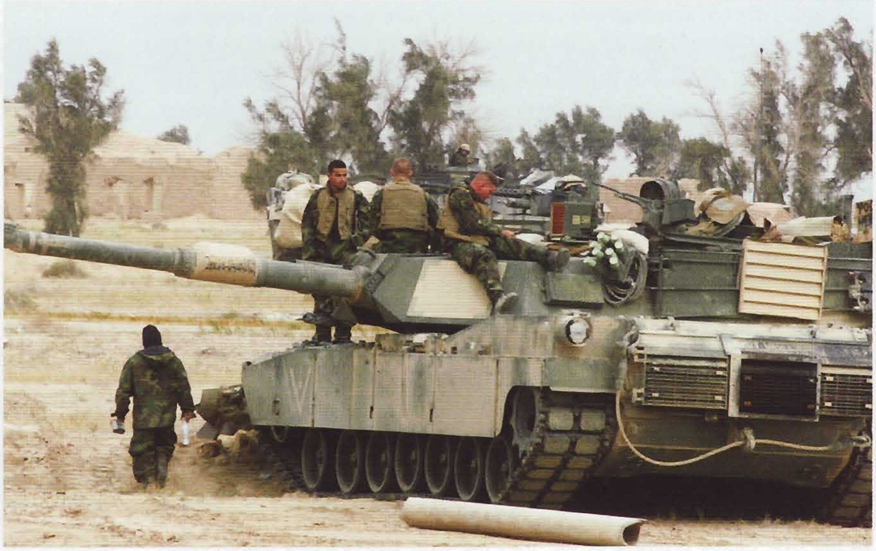
A Scimitar reconnaissance tank of the Royal Irish Regiment of the UK Army is drawn up next to an AAVP7A1 of Charlie Company, 1/5 Marines, on 22 March. The British Scimitar features a 30mm RARDEN L21A cannon and 7.62mm coaxial machine gun in its two-man turret. The FV107 Scimitar weighs 7,800kg and can whisk its three-man crew around the battlefield at 80 km/h. U.S. Marines secured several GOSPS (Gas Oil Separation Plant) of the southern Rumaylah oilfields before conducting a RIP (Relief in Place) with British units. The British deployed around 120 Challenger 2 tanks, 150 Warrior IFVs and 32 AS-90 152mm self-propelled howitzers in Operation Telic, the British name for OIF. (Sgt. Kevin R. Reed, USMC)



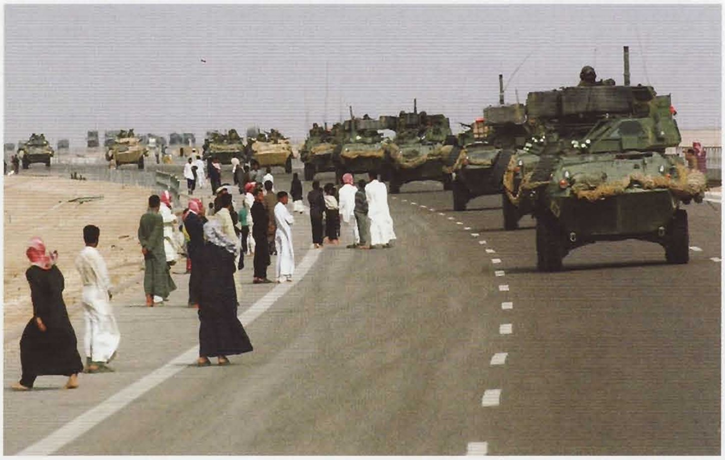
This convoy of RCT-1, TF Inchon, is moving deeper into Iraq on 22 March. Visible on the left and in the rear vision mirror is a line of LVS MK48-18 Ribbon Bridge Transporters. This vehicle is a combination of the MK48 Front Body Unit and the MK18 Ribbon Bridge Transporter. The Front Power Unit (FPU) and Rear Body Unit (RBU) of the LVS are connected by a hydraulically powered articulated joint that permits 8-wheel drive. This joint assists in maneuvering the vehicle, increasing mobility, and allowing a large degree of independent movement between the front and rear units. (Cpl. Mace M. Gratz, USMC)



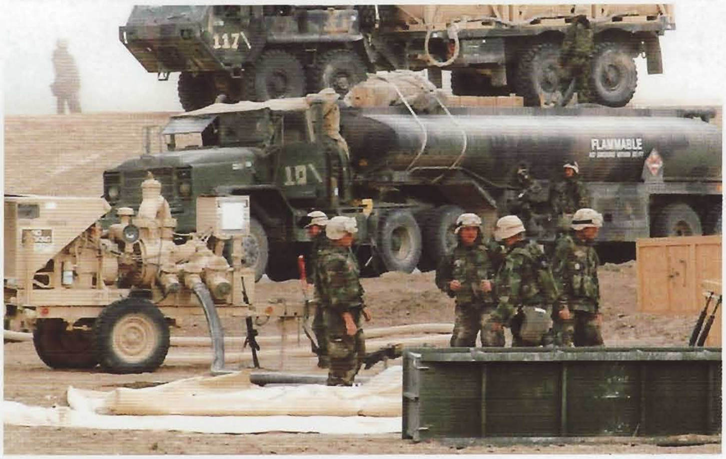
This is an M1045 TOW missile carrier Humvee of the CAAT (Combined Anti-Armor Team), Weapons Company, 2/2 Marines, 24th MEU. Evident on the roof is the TOW launcher and an M240G 7.62mm machine gun. The occupants have hung their flak jackets from the windows of their vehicle, but these will be donned once they set out on convoy escort duty in southern Iraq. (Sgt. Zachary A. Bathon, USMC)



M1A1 Abrams of Charlie Company, 1st Tanks, conduct vehicle maintenance near Az Zubayr on 22 March. This tank has the name "Hermes", the Greek messenger of the gods, painted on its main gun bore evacuator. The crew wears "coyote" brown Interceptor "flak jackets" or IBA (Individual Body Armor). Coiled around the smoke grenade launcher are "slave" cables used to assist or "jump start" other vehicles. The M1A1 tank's three machine guns ended up being the weapons of choice in numerous engagements in a target rich environment. This was due to Iraqi armor not being deployed in as great a number as their infantry. (Sgt. Paul L. Anstine II, USMC)



LAVs (Light Armored Vehicle) lead a column through southern Iraq. The lead vehicle is an LAV-AD, an LAV variant armed with two four-round Stinger anti-aircraft missile launchers, in addition to a 25mm GAU-12 triple-barreled Gatling gun. The weapon system features a FLIR (Forward Looking Infrared Radar) targeting sensor and a digital data link. It is an improvement on the capability of the Humvee-based Avenger system. More examples of this vehicle are also apparent further down the column. While there was no need for the LAV-AD to defend against Iraqi aircraft, its firepower was devastating against ground targets. (Courtesy of Brandon Wright, USMC)



A fuel and water distribution center is being set up in Iraq by Engineer Company, CSSB-10 (Combat Service Support Battalion), 1st FSSG (Force Support Service Group), during I MEF's 650km advance to Baghdad. In the background carrying three potable water tanks is a MK48-14 LVS of CSSC-117, one of CSSB-10's constituent companies. The vehicle in front of it is an M931 tractor truck hauling a fuel trailer. CSSB-10 was later to receive the DoD's Phoenix Trophy, the highest annual award given to any military maintenance unit for its excellent performance in Iraq. (Courtesy of CSSB-10)

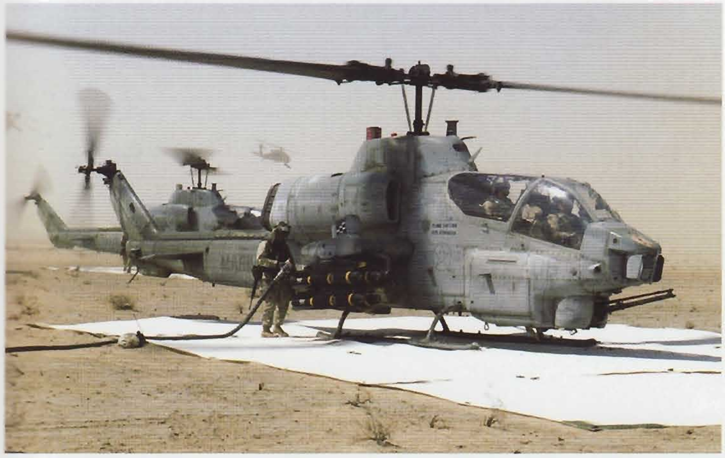
From An Nasiriyah to the Tigris River

Sunday 23 March

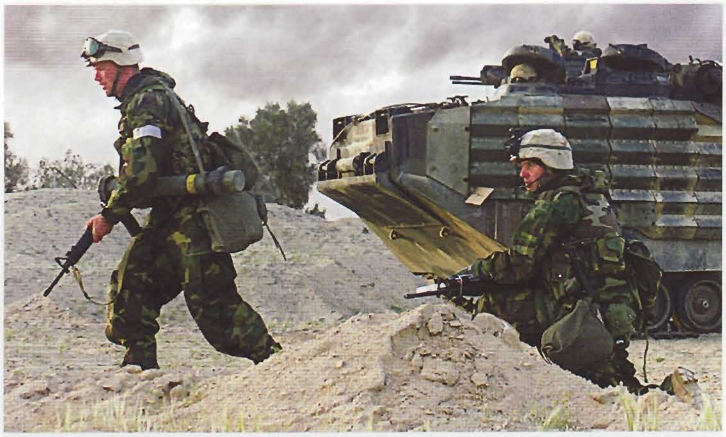
The overall I MEF plan called for a two-pronged attack towards the Tigris River. While the main effort would continue up Highway 1 towards Ad Diwaniyah with two regiments, RCT-5 Grizzly and RCT-7 Ripper. I MEF was also going to attack north along Highway 7 with one regiment, RCT-1 Inchon, to put pressure on Al Kut from the south. This would fix the Baghdad Republican Guard in place and prevent it from threatening the main river crossings.

Resistance in a number of locations was stiffening, including at An Nasiriyah, home to 500,000 mostly Shiite people. The 3rd ID had earlier captured a strategic highway junction several kilometers south of An Nasiriyah. This Army unit had taken up blocking positions outside the city, but now control of the city's bridges had to be wrested by RCT-2, TF Tarawa, a force of 6,000 from the II MEF, with the 2nd Marine Regiment at its core. This town was to prove pivotal in coming days as virtually the entire I MEF had to travel through or around this node of An Nasiriyah. The main Baghdad-Basra Highway 1 crosses the Euphrates River and Saddam Canal about 13km to the west of the city. Additionally, Highway 7 has twin bridges that cross in the city itself. Meanwhile, the Army was establishing its first logistics site just south of An Nasiriyah, which needed protection by Marines. This city was of huge strategic importance.

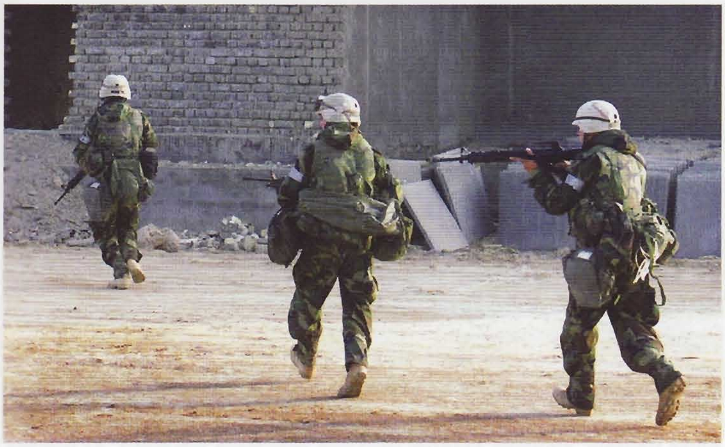
At 0300 hours the lead elements of TF Tarawa, halted 15km south of An Nasiriyah were ordered forward towards the city. The urgency was stepped up by one of the most infamous and publicized incidents of the entire war, when a pre-dawn Army convoy of 507th Maintenance Company lost its way and was ambushed in An Nasiriyah. Eleven members were killed and five taken prisoner, including PFC Jessica Lynch. This small success was to give Iraqi units a temporary shot in the arm. Several hours after daybreak, 1/2 Marines of TF Tarawa approached from the southeast to secure the southern Highway 7 bridge first, and Alpha Company achieved this around noon. They then planned to drive north along Highway 7 through the eastern outskirts of the city to the second bridge over Saddam Canal. Then finally they would turn west and secure the third bridge over the same waterway. This plan meant that Marines would not have to enter or occupy the city proper. However, it was found that communications between Army and Marine units was deficient, and in like manner, radio communication within the Marines, particularly between the 1st MarDiv and TF Tarawa, was at times non-existent.



Three days into OIF and an AH-1W Cobra from 3rd MAW (Marine Aircraft Wing) is being refueled. The location is at a FARP (Forward Arming Refueling Point) located at a former Iraqi airbase. An MWSS-373 (Marine Wing Support Squadron) Marine from the bulk fuels section conducts the task. In OIF, Cobra helicopters employed for the first time a new version of the Hellfire missile called the AGM-114N. The AGM-114N uses a thermobaric warhead that dispenses an explosive mist upon hitting a target, therefore producing an explosion that can reach into every corner of a building, bunker or cave. (LCpl. C. H. Fitzgerald, USMC)



On the foremost Marine, who is carrying an AT-4, is a colored piece of "riggers" tape on which is written the soldier's name and blood type, a practice that many Marines and soldiers adopted. Different colors of "100 mile an hour" or duct tape were used. The reason for this was that in the case of a chemical attack, it is difficult to identify people once they put their field protective masks on. Additionally, dog tags with information on blood type are inaccessible when a patient has been wounded in a contaminated environment. This dismounted team from the 15th MEU moves towards their objective near Az Zubayr on 23 March, supported by fires from an AAV. (LCpl. Brian L. Wickliffe, USMC)



A group of Marines wielding M16A2 5.56mm assault rifles clears a series of buildings near Az Zubayr on 23 March. They belong to Echo Company, BLT 2/1, 15th MEU. They wear woodland camouflage CPOGs (Chemical Protective Over-Garment). Attached to the rearmost Marine's equipment are plastic "zip" ties for handcuffing EPWs (Enemy Prisoners of War). (LCpl. Brian L. Wickliffe, USMC)

An AAV in a staging area in Az Zubayr on 23 March. These members of Charlie Company, 1/7 Marines, have prepared hasty "fighting holes" and settle down to enjoy some chow, in this case an MRE (Meal, Ready to Eat). It was much safer to sleep or rest next to a vehicle than out in the open, due to the risk of being run over by a vehicle or tank that has not put ground guides out front during nighttime or low visibility conditions. (LCpl. Kevin C. Quihuis Jr., USMC)

As fires burn near Umm Qasr, a Marine of the 15th MEU dashes over rough terrain to clear Iraqi defensive positions on 23 March. The tape with ID and medical details is again in evidence, wrapped around the arm of the Marine nearest the camera. The method of clearing enemy trenches and positions has altered little from the World War II battles of Iwo Jima or Tarawa. A grenade is tossed into the 'hot trench', and after it has detonated a rifle team leaps in to mop up any remaining resistance, with each rifleman positioned to fire in the different directions that an enemy may appear from. (USMC)

On 24 March, spare parts are salvaged from an TWMP (Track Width Mine Plow). The official name for the device is a Mine Clearing Blade. This "plow" was found after another unit abandoned it on Route Tampa. Tampa was the name applied to Highway 1, which was the MSR (Main Supply Route) leading directly from Basra to Baghdad. These Marines are members of C Co, 1st Tank Battalion, TF Ripper. (Sgt. Paul L. Anstine II, USMC)

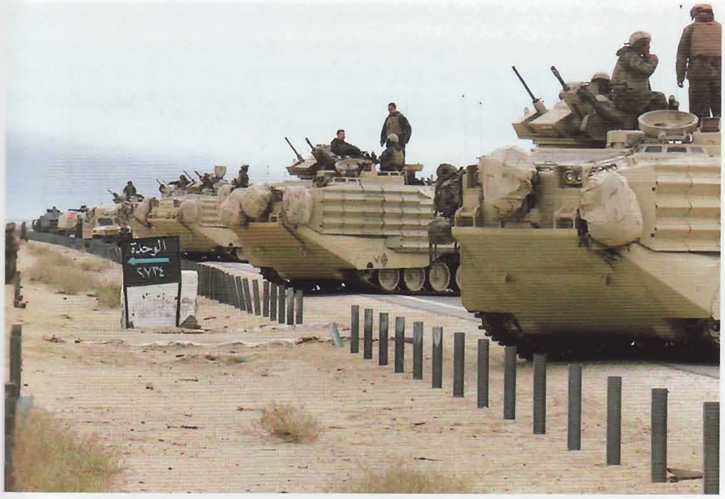
A host of vehicles including M1A1s, AAVs and Humvees line Highway 1's lanes on 24 March. These vehicles belong to Charlie Company, 1st Tank Battalion. They are waiting to get their turn at the nozzle and refuel. Tons of fuel, ammunition, food and water all had to be supplied daily in sufficient quantities to keep up the momentum of the attack. (Sgt. Paul L. Anstine II, USMC)

24 March. More lines of amphibious "tractors" and Humvees are drawn up on the highway as they aim for Baghdad. Marine commanders knew they would only have two MSRs to push supplies up so they consequently took everything possible with them, which made the supply routes even longer. Unfortunately MPs were not included in the forward echelons and were therefore unable to keep the long supply lines moving smoothly. Likewise, because of the bottlenecks they could not get to the forward echelons to clear the chokepoints. (GySgt Erik S. Hansen, USMC)

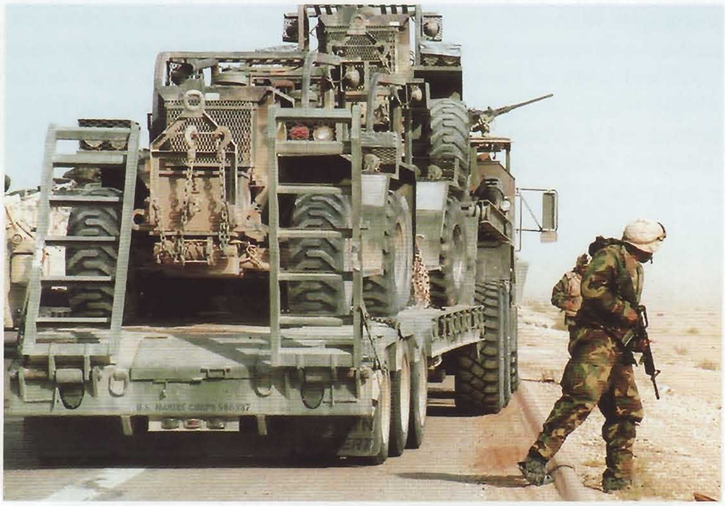
Charlie Company, 1/2 Marines, crossed over the first bridge before proceeding north up Highway 7 for 4km with its eleven AAVs. Just after four of them had crossed the northern bridge, they were abruptly halted by a well-prepared ambush. Iraqis blazed away with machine guns from the outskirts of town, while others fired RPGs at 45º angles as though they were mortar shells. One AAV was immediately hit by an RPG, and the company was separated into two groups north and south of the bridge. The dismounted Marines were pinned down by enemy fire, as groups of *fedayeen* scurried amongst the nearby houses to unleash their deadly fusillades. The company's radio communications were ineffectual so they were unable to call for fire support. An Amtrac full of wounded was ordered to withdraw but as it roared south away from the battle zone it was hit by an RPG and exploded when ammunition stored inside detonated. One of its escorting AAVs was also catastrophically hit. Shortly after this there was a tragic case of friendly fire when a USAF A-10 Warthog strafed the southward facing AAVs sitting in the road, mistaking them for reported BMPs. This added further to the casualties.

Another fateful incident occurred in the afternoon when a group of Iraqis dressed in civilian clothing displayed a white flag of surrender, but fired on an AAV as it approached. An RPG round slammed into the side of the vehicle, killing all its Marine occupants. By 5:00 p.m., Alpha Company, 1/2 Marines, with tank support from Alpha Company, 8th Tank Battalion in the lead, finally managed to reach the entrapped members at the northern bridge. With the arrival of the M1A1 tanks, enemy fire immediately slackened. Marine Cobra and Huey helicopters flew low in support, as AV-8 Harriers, A-10 Thunderbolts, and F/A-18 Hornets swooped above the city. CH-46E helicopters bravely landed to evacuate the wounded. A temporary command center codenamed Nightmare had been set up south of the town, alongside a landing ground for helicopters to evacuate the wounded.

In the aftermath it was found that ten Iraqi T-55 tanks, plus artillery batteries and anti-aircraft guns had been destroyed. In the course of this bitter fighting, eighteen Marines died and fifty were wounded. At last the key twin bridges were declared 'secure', but the stretch of road between the two bridges was insecure and still came under enemy fire. This road was to be known as "Ambush Alley" or "RPG Alley", because of the large volume of Iraqi RPGs fired at any unit using this route.



Part of the same convoy on 24 March. These sand-colored AAVs point their guns skyward to prevent shooting their own in the event of a negligent discharge. The UGWS (Up-Gunned Weapon Station) AAV has a highly reliable 12.7mm M48 Turret-Mounted Machine Gun on the right side of the electrically operated main turret, complemented by a potent 40mm Mk.19 automatic grenade launcher on the left. Mounted on the rear of the "upgun" (as the turret is often referred to) are eight smoke grenade launchers. (GySgt Erik S. Hansen, USMC)



This is a supply convoy of CSSB-10 of 1st FSSG, which is home-stationed at MCAGCC (Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center) at Twentynine Palms, California. Visible is an M870 series flatbed trailer carrying heavy forklifts, as engineering equipment was required to accompany the advancing units. M870A1 and A2 trailers were found to be inadequate for the reliable transportation of heavy engineering equipment over cross-country terrain during combat operations. Some operators described the trailers as "flimsy", with routine cases of tires going flat or rims deforming while driving too quickly off-road. During the opening phases of OIF, CSSB-10 conducted more than 400 convoys and drove more than 120,000 miles in support of frontline units of the 1st MarDiv. (Courtesy of CSSB-10)

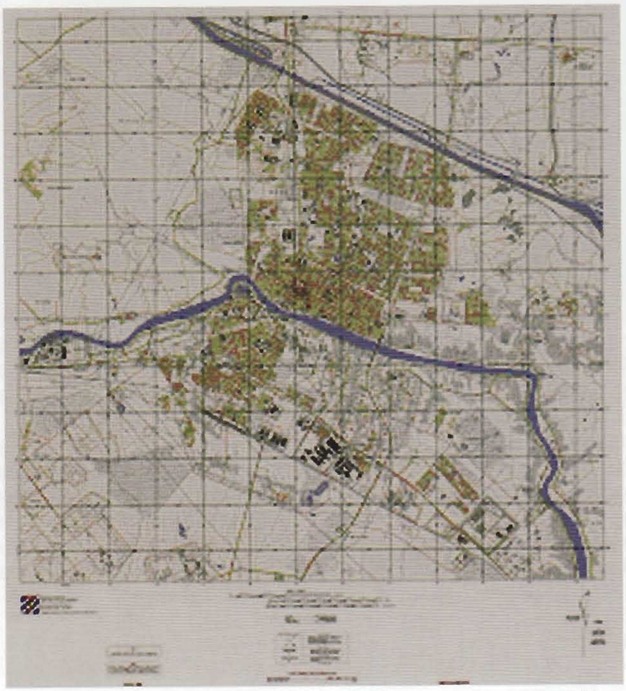
JP-8 fuel is pumped into the high capacity fuel cells of this Abrams belonging to C Co, 1st Tanks, on 24 March. It takes around twenty minutes to refuel both the front and rear cells of a thirsty Abrams. The enormity of the logistics effort can begin to be understood when it is considered that a single Abrams tank can consume up to 200 liters of fuel per hour! (Sgt. Paul L. Anstine II, USMC)

By now the main part of the I MEF formation had arrived in the vicinity of An Nasiriyah along Highway 1, after traveling north through the southern desert. RCT-1 would be held up there until the route through the city could be secured. Meanwhile the lead units of RCT-5 and RCT-7 were given orders to penetrate north along Highway 1 towards Ad Diwaniyah. Marine units began advancing rapidly along this route, with the ultimate goal of Baghdad now only 300km away. The broad purpose behind this plan of rapid attack was to fragment the enemy into small pockets that would hopefully surrender once Saddam's government was toppled, as well as avoiding any confrontations in major urban areas. The downside of this strategy was that the enemy could approach or threaten U.S. units from any direction, as there would be no classic 'frontline'. Highway 1 was engineered to avoid any built-up areas, and this route was perfect for the Marines' advance as they could amass huge firepower in open country. There were now 170,000 U.S. Army, Marine and allied troops inside Iraq.

Monday 24 March

The offensive against Iraqi forces ground on in An Nasiriyah, and the 1st Marine Division still had no reliable communications with TF Tarawa. The bitter conflict included such unconventional spectacles as enemy fighters that leapt out of taxis and buses to shoot at Marines. This was precisely the kind of warfare that the Americans had sought to avoid. Even when regular Iraqi soldiers wanted to give up fighting, they were coerced by *fedayeen*. One captured soldier stated, "You can't run away from the unit. If you try to take off your uniform, they'll kill you." The destruction of property engendered by this combat did nothing to endear Americans to the local residents. Later, when asked about the fierce resistance put up by irregular forces like the *fedayeen*, Lt. Gen. James Conway stated, "I think the tenacity of the *fedayeen* in particular was not a shock, but a surprise. On a scale of 10, I'd put it at 6." There were numerous cases of civilians being killed, especially as they sought to flee the scene in vehicles without heeding warning shots fired at them. Marines were understandably jittery during the heated violence and ferocity of the fighting, a natural result of the devious ruses and tactics employed by their irregular enemy.

In the mid-afternoon, RCT-1 loaded up in their AAVs ready to run the gauntlet of "Ambush Alley". 2nd LAR with its LAV-25s and an attached tank platoon from Alpha Company, 1st Tanks, led the way as it dashed through the city up Highway 7. This vanguard took small-arms fire at the north end of the city, but emerged unscathed. The 'fog of war' continued to conspire with conflicting reports and extremely poor communications, as the AAVs remained hesitantly south of the city. There were now units north and south of the urban area, but none picketing the route in the middle where the highway passed through the city. A plan was finally formed and at midnight 3/1 Marines deployed its forty-two AAVs to line and guard the route as other units waited impatiently to advance north.



Map of An Nasiriyah and its strategic bridges (Courtesy of U.S. Army)

This column of Charlie Company, 1st Tanks, moves along MSR Tampa in the vicinity of Jalibah Airfield on 24 March. Included in the convoy is an M60 AVLB. Capable of moving at only just over 30km/h, the M60 AVLB was slower than most of the columns it traveled in. In convoy operations, some of the AVLBs could not keep pace and fell behind, constantly spending a great deal of time playing "catch up". In any case, AVLBs were not widely employed and only a couple of bridges were launched in support of combat operations. (Sgt. Paul L. Anstine II, USMC)

Another scene from the same refueling stop of 1/7 Marines, with their Amtracs on the left halted in a "herringbone" formation stipulated by unit SOP (Standard Operating Procedure). Every MAGTF (Marine Air Ground Task Force), from a smaller MEU to the largest MEF, consists of four distinct parts – a HQ (Headquarters), a GCE (Ground Combat Element), a CSE (Combat Support Element), and an ACE (Air Combat Element). Each of these elements required sufficient materials on hand to operate unsupplied for three days if need be. (LCpl. Kevin C Quihuis Jr, USMC)

It was on this day that tremendous sandstorms began, seriously disrupting normal ground operations. Strong winds swept across Iraq and down into the Gulf, enveloping combatants in choking clouds of dust and sand. Towards evening it rained, but the air was so thick with sand that the raindrops turned into muddy globules – it was literally raining mud! Some Marines dubbed it "The Day of Dirt". Despite the poor weather, I MEF made an attack 50km south of Ad Diwaniyah late in the evening. Fighting between British and Iraqi regular and irregular forces continued in the south. The British would hold their positions around Basra for the following two weeks.

Tuesday 25 March

Sandstorms continued to pound the region, with winds of up to 160km/h obscuring the battlefield. These harsh conditions bogged down troops and grounded helicopters but had negligible effect on ongoing aerial bombing missions. On any occasion the fine talcum powder-like dust of Iraq is hard on optical equipment and mechanical parts of tracked and wheeled vehicles, but now the raging winds also reduced visibility to only a few feet. To date, only 4,000 Iraqis had been taken prisoner, which was far fewer than expected. It seems that many Iraqi combatants simply doffed

In yet another convoy near Az Zubayr, vehicles of Charlie Company, 1/7 Marines are refueled on 24 March. The line on the right includes AAVs and on the left are LVS trucks. On any given day during the conflict, there were about 2,500 logistics vehicles traveling on Iraq's roads, moving 1.5 million liters of water and 333,000 MREs (Meals, Ready to Eat) needed for each day's combat. (LCpl. Kevin C Quihuis Jr, USMC)

their uniforms, left the battlefield and returned to their homes. The advance along Highway 1 continued, but as visibility declined, all forward troop movement was cancelled.

RCT-1 convoys that had been moving through An Nasiriyah since midnight had all ground to a halt by daybreak, while 2nd LAR was reporting a firefight 10km north of the city. Its LAVs and attached tank platoon were in a heavy fight with Iraqi forces attempting to reinforce those defenders already in An Nasiriyah. Throughout the morning, RCT-1 continued to inch its way through "Ambush Alley" and over the bridges, until by 2:00 p.m. the final RCT-1 vehicle had passed through. Once the combat team was on its way north up Highway 7 towards Al Kut., TF Tarawa could then devote itself to squeezing An Nasiriyah's defenders.

Marines of 3/7 act as "Guardian Angels" and provide "over watch" security while their convoy pauses along Highway 8 near Basra on 24 March. The American strategy of making a beeline for Baghdad, and not dealing with every Iraqi unit along the way, meant the enemy could approach from any direction, and that there was no such thing as a safe rear area. It was not a classic linear battlefield with a defined frontline, but a true 360º battlefield. This was a factor known when the battle plan was formulated. (LCpl. Jennifer Krusen, USMC)

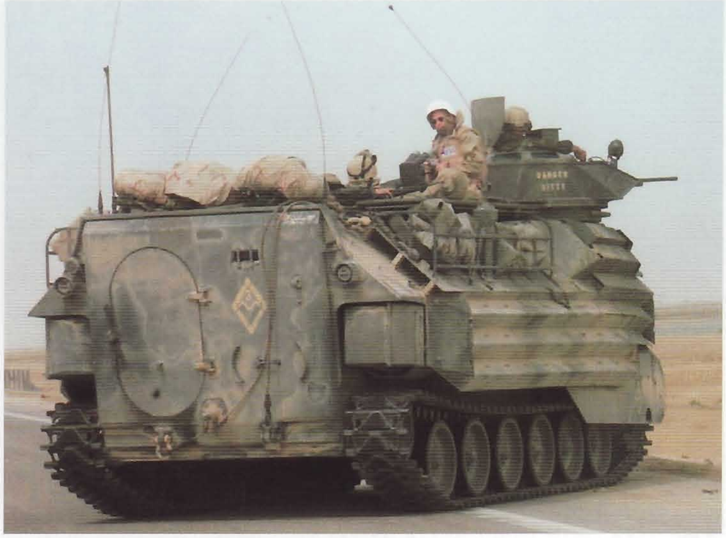
A Headquarters Battalion convoy of the 1st MarDiv in the vicinity of Basra in southern Iraq on 24 March. The DASC marking on the Humvee denotes Direct Air Support Center, an aviation command and control system. The DASC helps coordinate aircraft employment with other supporting arms, processes requests for immediate air support, and coordinates the use of aircraft. The 7-ton MTVR trucks are fitted with M66 ring mounts and heavy .50-cal M2 HB machine guns for self-protection. The gunners are exposed to hostile fire in these positions, and the only thing between them and the enemy is their Kevlar helmets and flak jackets. Autopsies of U.S. servicemen KIA in Iraq showed that the single most common fatality was caused by a hit in the head (mostly the neck and face since the rest is well protected by the Kevlar helmet). (LCpl. Jennifer Krusen, USMC)

With the aid of Special Forces and pinpoint bombing they forced their way forward block-by-block against Iraqi forces, crushing resistance as they went.

Marines gained control of a military hospital near An Nasiriyah that had been used as a paramilitary HQ and staging area. Dressed in civilian clothing, paramilitaries were driven in buses to this hospital to obtain ammunition and weapons for the fight. Inside Marines found 200 weapons, military uniforms, a T-55 tank, 3,000 chemical protective suits and nerve agent antidote injections. They captured nearly 170 Iraqi fighters. Meanwhile the 3rd ID was engaged in bruising battles with Iraqi regular and paramilitary forces in the Shiite holy city of An Najaf.

Wednesday 26 March

Adverse weather and strong winds persisted, meaning that positions remained relatively stationary. Low visibility and a fear of military or suicide attacks, combined with fatigue, made it a stressful time for combatants. As a unit of 120 Marines approached the first bridge in An Nasiriyah, they came under heavy fire from Iraqi assault rifles and RPGs.



This AAV of 3rd AAB named 'Danger Kitty' carries a white-helmeted and flak jacketed press member busy taking photographs of a 1st MarDiv convoy on 24 March. There were eighty reporters embedded within the division, and generally the coexistence was one of mutual respect for each other's work. (LCpl. Jennifer Krusen, USMC)

Another view of the same Headquarters Battalion convoy. The nearest Humvee is a two-door soft-top M998, and the extended fording air intake and exhaust that are typical of Marine Humvees is evident in the picture. Due to the nature of the advance, forces following in the trace of the leading units were often fired upon or ambushed by Iraqis who fell back in on fighting positions that they had abandoned during earlier fighting. (LCpl. Jennifer Krusen, USMC)

M1A1 main battle tanks of C Co, 1st Tank Battalion, are refueled from LVS fuel tankers on MSR Tampa. The company is in the vicinity of Jalibah Airfield on 24 March. The fast rate of movement and maneuvering over long distances in such short periods of time caused units to use great amounts of fuel sooner than projected. The mechanized operation lasted three weeks, testing the capabilities of the logistics structure to the maximum. (Sgt. Paul L. Anstine II, USMC)

A total of fifteen of their Humvees and seven-ton trucks were destroyed, and sixty Marines wounded. Block-by-block fighting against regular and irregular troops, some in civilian clothing, had already been underway for five full days. Convoys could use the bridges, but the American hold on the city was far from complete. It was a turkey shoot, so convoy vehicles would barrel through "Ambush Alley" at top speed.

At sunset, 1,000 Iraqis launched their most methodical attack yet on American positions south of the town. They approached along a railroad that the Americans had failed to block off. The Iraqis attacked with machine gun fire, and close conflict raged on far into the night. On one occasion an artillery position was so close to being overrun that a communications officer was getting ready to destroy the electronic code boxes used for encrypted radio transmissions, to prevent them falling into enemy hands. However, just as suddenly as it started, the attack melted away. Over thirty Marines had been wounded, but none killed in this furious defense. Marines dug in to secure their positions against further attacks. The fighting in An Nasiriyah turned out to be the bloodiest in the whole liberation of Iraq, and the I MEF Commanding General observed that the Iraqi 11th Infantry Division in the area had put up what was probably the strongest resistance of any of the Iraqi divisions faced by the USMC. By the time Marines had gained control of the city, more than thirty soldiers and Marines were reported dead. Casualties amongst Iraqis were worse, with the city's Saddam Hussein General Hospital receiving 200 patients a day at the peak of the fighting. However, the vital convoys were able to keep moving north across the bridges and through the "Ambush Alley" gauntlet to re-supply units further north.

This is one of the typical I MEF convoys that swept north up the highways of Iraq in the race towards Baghdad, when they were not stuck in traffic jams, that is! This convoy is made up mostly of AAVs and Humvees, as they travel north on 24 March. The norm for support convoys was soft-skinned transport vehicles that offered little armored protection to their operators. After action studies called for more Blue Force Trackers, high-tech radios, and better armor protection (for example, armored Humvees) for transport personnel. (GySgt. Erik S. Hansen, USMC)

The strongest prong bypassed Ad Diwaniyah east of the Euphrates River, while the second smaller one headed towards Al Kut on the southern bank of the Tigris River. In recent days the American military juggernaut had faced an unexpected lack of resistance as it advanced, leaving many Marines wondering where Saddam's army was. Troops were also uncovering disturbing evidence that Iraqi soldiers were being forced to fight under the threat of death. One captive explained, "The officers threatened to shoot us unless we fought. They took out their guns and pointed them and told us to fight." In Kurdish territory in the north, a combat team from the 173rd Airborne Brigade parachuted into a secure airfield in Bashur in a show of force. This bolstered the northern front that had hitherto consisted only of Special Forces and Kurdish fighters.

Thursday 27 March

The weather was improving as RCT-5's column of Abrams and Amtracs raced along the paved highway at 65km/h, and USAF A-10 Thunderbolts made lazy passes overhead. An airstrip at Hantush was taken which could be used to bring in fresh supplies to bolster diminishing stores of ammunition, food and fuel. At this stage, RCT-1 was positioned at the intersection of Highways 7 and 17 on the way to Al Kut. RCT-7 was at the junction of Highways 1 and 17, while RCT-5 had traveled 38km further north on Highway 1 to Hantush and "the elbow". "The elbow" was the

This LAV-AT has taken up a hull-down position, with its "hammerhead" TOW launcher raised in the firing position. The eight-wheeled LAV-AT can carry two TOW missiles ready in the launcher and an additional fourteen stowed onboard. With its erectable TOW launchers, the vehicle can sit behind a small rise in the ground and keep the vehicle's hull protected from direct fire. The LAV-AT also features an M240G machine gun on a pintle mount that is supplied with 200 7.62mm rounds. These members of 1st LAR are providing security for a vital bridge crossing over the Euphrates River on 24 March. (GySgt. Erik S. Hansen, USMC)

Set against the backdrop of an LAV heavily laden with its crew's personal gear, a company commander of 1st LAR briefs his platoon commanders and sergeants. A frameless sand-colored CIP (Combat Identification Panel) used for identifying friendly vehicles can be seen behind the map. The date is 25 March. (LCpl. Andrew P. Roufs, USMC)

intersection of Highways 1 and 27, and Marines would suddenly wheel right here to approach An Numaniyah and the Tigris from the southwest. However, on the same day Lt. Gen. David D. McKiernan, the Coalition Forces Land Force Commander, ordered all Army and Marine troops to halt because of concern over vulnerable LOCs and shortages of supplies. This required 2/5 Marines to abandon the Hantush airstrip, basically a length of road straight and wide enough to allow C-130 planes to land, and make a tactical withdrawal back to rejoin RCT-7 near Ad Diwaniyah. This was necessary to disguise the planned deception where I MEF would swing right onto Highway 27. This tactical pause was to continue until 30 March.

In the war, dug-in Iraqi tanks or paramilitary "technicals"[6] were generally dealt with by tank or TOW missile fire at long-range before they could get close enough to pose a threat. Regular forces were usually pinned down by unrelenting aerial strikes, while artillery pounded the defenses ahead of the advance and helicopter gunships prowled the skies ready to pounce on targets of opportunity. In the extreme south of Iraq, the 3rd UK Commando Brigade and 15th MEU mopped up residual resistance around Al Faw.

In this picture are two Marine CH-46E Sea Knights and a pair of Army UH-60 MEDEVAC Blackhawks refuel at this carefully sited FARP on a paved road near Jalibah Airfield on 25 March. They are conducting a "hot" refuel, meaning that engines are still running and rotors still turning. Once their fuel tanks are topped up, they will rejoin the fast-moving fray further north. The CH-46E helicopters were kept deployed as far forward as the tactical situation would allow in order and air MEDEVAC was generally available within forty-five minutes. CASEVAC was predominantly made by wheeled vehicle to a secure LZ (Landing Zone), before a helicopter would evacuate casualties back to surgical units. (Sgt. Giles M. Isham, USMC)

Friday 28 March

The halt near Ad Diwaniyah continued, though combat patrols were ongoing to clear the flanks of the advance, and I MEF defeated an attack by irregulars who utilized APCs, rocket launchers and AA systems used as artillery. Even more TF Tarawa Marines were wounded in a ninety-minute fight in An Nasiriyah. A battery of nine Iraqi D-30 howitzers and mortar positions were destroyed there. Hitherto the advance had met with both regular and irregular armed resistance. Increasingly, coalition forces found that many diehard Iraqi paramilitaries had no qualms about using women and children as shields. In defense, Iraqis would typically line main roadways to create a 'killing zone' with their small arms and RPGs. This resistance was usually overcome by infantry dismounting from their AAVs ahead of these zones, before proceeding to roll up the flanks of the Iraqi defenders.

This M1A1 Abrams of 1st Tank Battalion sits on the outskirts of An Nasiriyah, the site of vicious fighting that lasted many days. This heavy tank provides security as convoys continue to pass over the city's strategic Euphrates bridge crossings on 25 March. During the OIF assault, an informal competition was held among all tank crews as to who could get the longest-range tank kill using the main gun. (USMC)

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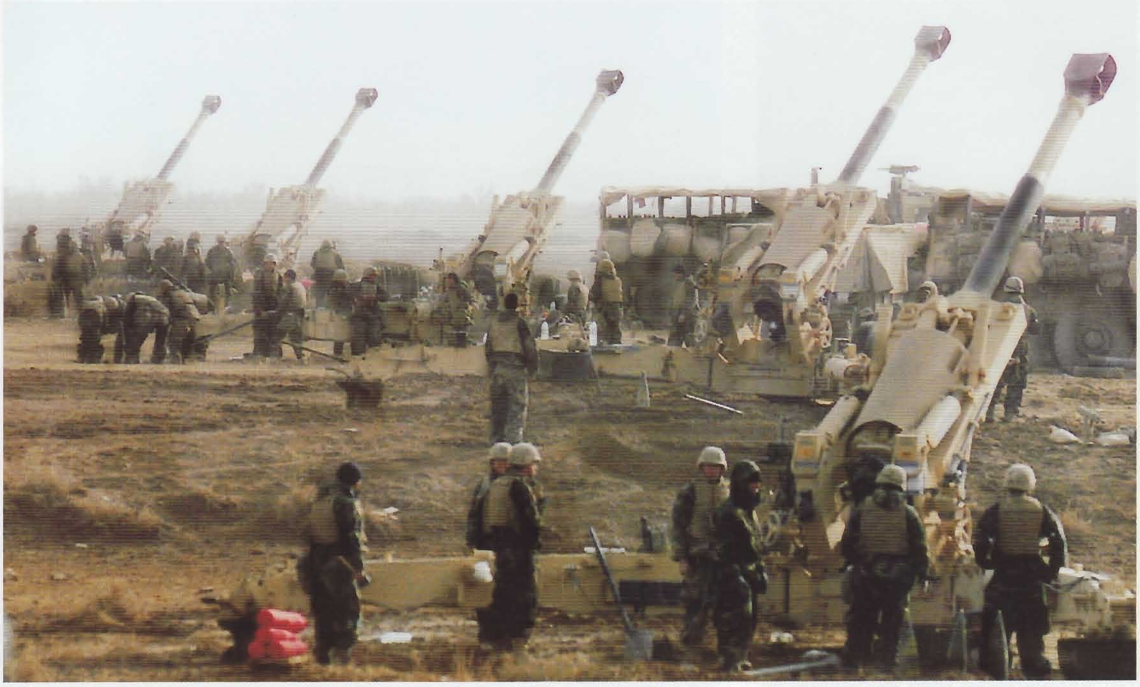
[6] - "Technicals" were standard pickup trucks fitted out with weapons and weapon mounts, generally operated by irregulars such as the *fedayeen*. They were first met with in Somalia, and the name has stuck since.



A view of M198s from India Company, 3/11 Marines, of RCT-5. For a long time, fractures of the M198 travel lock have been a problem, with the locks important in preventing stress on the gun's hydraulic system when in transit. However, the frequency of these fractures has increased with the introduction of the more powerful and agile MTVR towing vehicle. During OIF, drivers tended to drive too fast cross-country with over-inflated tires while towing the M198. This resulted in an increase in such fractures. (Sgt. Kevin R. Reed, USMC)

India Battery, 3/11 Marines. A gun crew covers their ears as they fire their 155mm M198 howitzer in support of RCT-5 missions on 26 March. The powerful MTVR towed the heavy M198s throughout OIF, a job the Oshkosh truck is ideally suited for. However, many of the windshields of these trucks did not survive the blast of the howitzer's bigger Super 8 charges! The artillery round of choice from supported units was DP-ICM (Dual-Purpose Improved Conventional Munitions). This shell explodes before hitting the ground, thus showering the target below with multiple bomblets. Crews also found the high cargo bed height of the new truck made it more difficult to manually load and unload ammunition projectiles. (Sgt. Kevin R. Reed, USMC)

Led by an M1045 TOW missile carrier, a convoy of Humvees advances through the sandstorm that raged across Iraq for several days between 24 and 26 March. The markings on the door, "W/1/5", signify that it belongs to Weapons Company of 1/5 Marines. Gunners man the roof-mounted automatic weapons on each vehicle, while the leading vehicle also has a CIP affixed on the door. (LCpl. Andrew P. Roufs, USMC)

At this point, some military commentators were prophesying that the war was not going as well as it should have been, blaming the slowdown on a shortage of forces on the ground. A combination of sandstorms, militia forces that were attacking supply convoys, and U.S. forces with stretched logistics lines came together to stall the advance. Momentum was diminished but not lost. The order for all coalition units to stop their advance did allow Marines to refuel vehicles, rearm weapons, maintain equipment, rest soldiers, and replenish supplies. This was beneficial for the upcoming rapid movement across the Tigris.

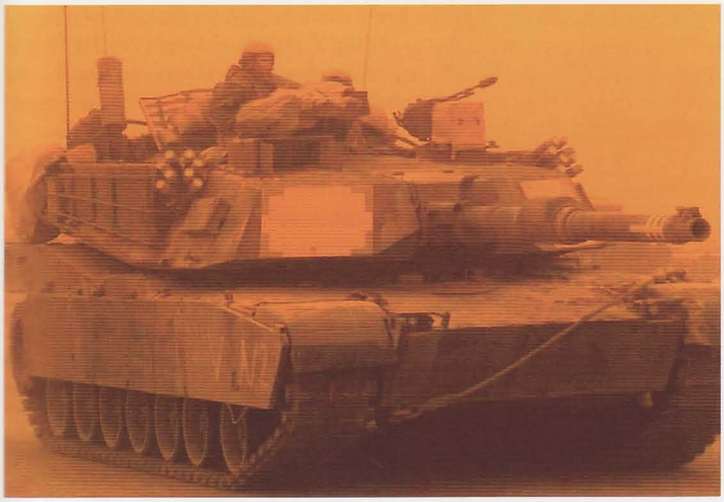
Saturday 29 March

Marines of RCT-1 continued to hold positions just north of Qalat Sukkar in their quest to reach Al Kut. I MEF was champing at the bit as they had built up momentum and felt no need of such a tactical pause. However, as the supporting attack to V Corps, they were forced to wait for further orders before continuing their advance. This was the worst day of the war in terms of casualties, with twenty-nine U.S. deaths. Contributing to this total was an A-10 Thunderbolt which killed nine Marines in a friendly fire incident.

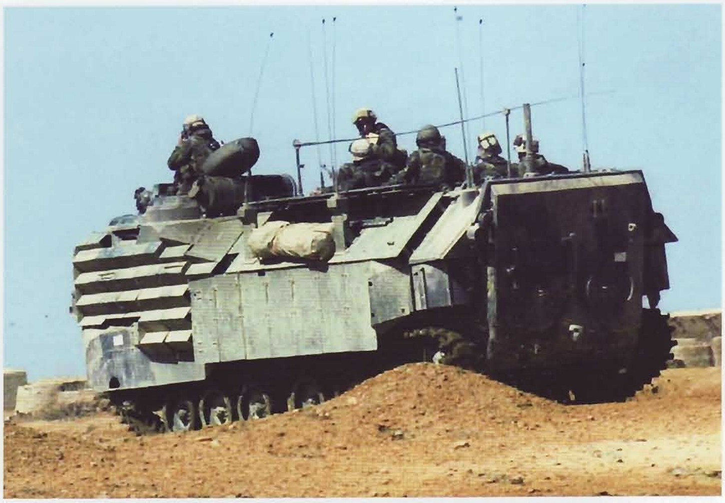
3/4 Marines, who were clearing Highway 17 from west to east, found Afak, 30km east of Ad Diwaniyah, to be an open city. They continued as far as Al Budayr, with only minor skirmishes as Ba'athists fled before them. This opened up Highway 17 to be used as an alternative supply route for RCT-5 and RCT-7. At dawn in An Nasiriyah in an assault, Marines seized a military warehouse, finding more than 300 chemical suits, masks, antidotes and other chemical warfare equipment inside.

Sunday 30 March

Permission was finally given for the advance to continue, and the order filtered down to individual battalions. Marines were engaged in furious battles with Iraqi forces, finally pushing them back north from around Ad Diwaniyah. While Iraqi raids on American LOCs were at times fierce and furious, these tended to be more harassment than unified defense. New forces continued to flow into the Iraqi theater with 2,300 Marines from the 24th MEU transferring to Kuwait from the Horn of Africa to support OIF. They were assigned the role of extinguishing remaining resistance in restive An Nasiriyah, as well as securing supply lines in the rear.



This M1A1 of Alpha Company, 2nd Tanks, drives through the blinding sandstorm that at its worst reduced visibility to only a few meters. This tank has CIPs installed on the sloping turret front plates, sides and rear of the turret. These panels have a distinctive look when viewed through thermal sights and were designed to help prevent fratricide or "friendly fire" incidents. To protect against the wind-whipped sand and dust, the crew has placed a protective cone from one of the main gun's sabot rounds over the muzzle of the loader's M240 FN MAG58 machine gun. (LCpl. Andrew P. Roufs, USMC)



In an assault on a small town situated at the junction of Highways 7 and 17, an AAV with its complement of troops advances. This is a C7 command variant, distinguished by its array of up to thirteen antennas. Each maneuver battalion had at least one of these vehicles with which the battalion primary staff fought the battalion from. The C7 would also have a "chase" passenger variant (P7) assigned to move with it. The unit is 1/4 Marines, RCT-1 (TF Inchon) and the date is 27 March. (Cpl. Mace M. Gratz, USMC)

Monday 31 March

What was to occur next was maneuver warfare at its very best. Maj. Gen. Mattis had planned a deceptive feint that would keep Iraqi forces completely off-balance and open up the road to Baghdad. Maj.Gen. Mattis wanted the Iraqis to think that his force would continue directly up Highway 1 straight for Baghdad. Instead the plan actually called for the Marine force to suddenly swing northeast at the road junction of Highway 27. This would allow them to cross the Tigris River, and then advance again towards Baghdad along Highway 6 on the northern bank of the Tigris, before Iraqi units had time to respond. Up-to-date American intelligence allowed such a plan to be made and helped units to avoid the teeth of enemy defenses. As Iraqi units belatedly moved to respond to this sudden threat they would expose themselves to superior American combined arms firepower. This plan was to be pulled off perfectly, for Iraqis were busy defending Al Kut from the south and were not expecting an attack on the Tigris bridges farther north.

This photo shows the internal arrangement for the four litters of an M997 Humvee Maxi ambulance. Its patients are some Marines injured by an accident in their 7-ton truck north of An Nasiriyah on 27 March. They are being transported to RCT-1's RAS (Regimental Aid Station) for immediate treatment. During combat there was a mandated minimum three-vehicle convoy requirement with armed escort when evacuating or retrieving medical patients to guard against enemy attack. This was something that medical platoons were not equipped or manned for. Consequently, this required units to consolidate their ground medical casualty evacuations. (USMC)

RCT-5 retook Hantush Airfield after a daylong fight, since the Iraqis had reinforced defenses there in the intervening period. This provided them with a sorely needed forward rapid re-supply point for C-130 transport aircraft. To the Iraqis it appeared the main column was aiming for Hillah, but then it made its sudden right heel, and I MEF attack raced northeast along Highway 27 to seize a bridge over the Saddam Canal. Originally Gen. Conway had thought this movement would take three days, but in fact it took only four hours with RCT-5 in the lead, since the Iraqis were taken completely by surprise. Marines were now within 110km of Baghdad. Ash Shatra was also assaulted in an attack on the town's Ba'ath Party HQ by Marine Force Recon and LAR troops.

Tuesday 1 April

At 0600 hours, 3/4 Marines initiated a "reconnaissance in force" against Ad Diwaniyah to intimidate this center of militia activity. At the front, 1/5 Marines cleared Iraqi defenders from both banks of the Saddam Canal, 20km east on Highway 27, and this allowed the erection of several bridge crossing points at dusk. In fact, the assault so far marked one of the most

A Mk.19 40mm automatic grenade launcher has been mounted on a tripod on the ground to provide defensive fires. This weapon weighs 33kg, and fits on the same tripod used by the .50-cal M2 machine gun. The weapon can fire HEDP (High-Explosive, Dual Purpose), a round capable of penetrating 50mm of RHA (Rolled Homogeneous Armor) or an HE (High Explosive) round with a 15-meter casualty radius. These Marines are from the 7th Regiment and the date is 27 March. (GySgt. Erik S. Hansen, USMC)

During a lull in the fighting, a crewman of RCT-5 grabs chow at a re-supply point on 30 March. This AAV from 3rd AAB (Assault Amphibian Battalion) is inundated with crew equipment and paraphernalia hanging off the sides, with spare track links carried on the hull roof. (Sgt. Joseph R. Chenelly, USMC)

rapid sustained advances in the history of armored warfare. New records for long distance movement were being set daily, despite I MEF being a lighter force than the 3rd ID, and having been given several missions in southern Iraq that had already served to dilute its strength. So fast was their movement that Marines were relying heavily on aircraft for forward supply. They were able to keep pace with V Corps further west even though they were crossing rougher terrain and advancing against generally more intense resistance. Owing to U.S. lines of attack, Iraqi forces were continually forced to move to face American forces, and this exposed them to air attack by day or night, no matter what the weather conditions. In addition, Iraqi defenders generally failed to blow up bridges or make the best defensive use of waterways. In Al Kut I MEF moved directly against the Baghdad Mechanized Division, a Republican Guard unit.

It was on this day that an operation to rescue Pvt. Jessica Lynch took place in An Nasiriyah. Blackhawk helicopters of Task Force 20 (a Special Operations unit) and low-flying AC-130s dipped down towards the grounds of the hospital where she was being treated. Marines fanned out to form an outer perimeter, with Rangers creating a second defensive line, while Special Forces entered the hospital to bring out the seriously injured Lynch. They successfully whisked her away to safety in what turned out to be a PR coup. Elsewhere the 101st Airborne Division entered An Najaf in an effort to contain the town. More distantly, 4th ID equipment arrived in Kuwait City aboard four ships, after finally transiting through the Suez Canal.

The passengers of a pair of AAV7A1s from 2nd Platoon, C Co, 3rd AAB, quickly unloads from their vehicles after they were engaged by enemy fire on 1 April. Throughout the campaign, Iraqi fire could come from any direction and at any time. These Marines belong to Charlie Co, 1/5 Marines. Fedayeen and paramilitaries were more comfortable firing at Marines still mounted in their vehicles. However, their bravery quickly evaporated once Marines dismounted and started clearing positions on foot. (Sgt. Kevin R. Reed, USMC)

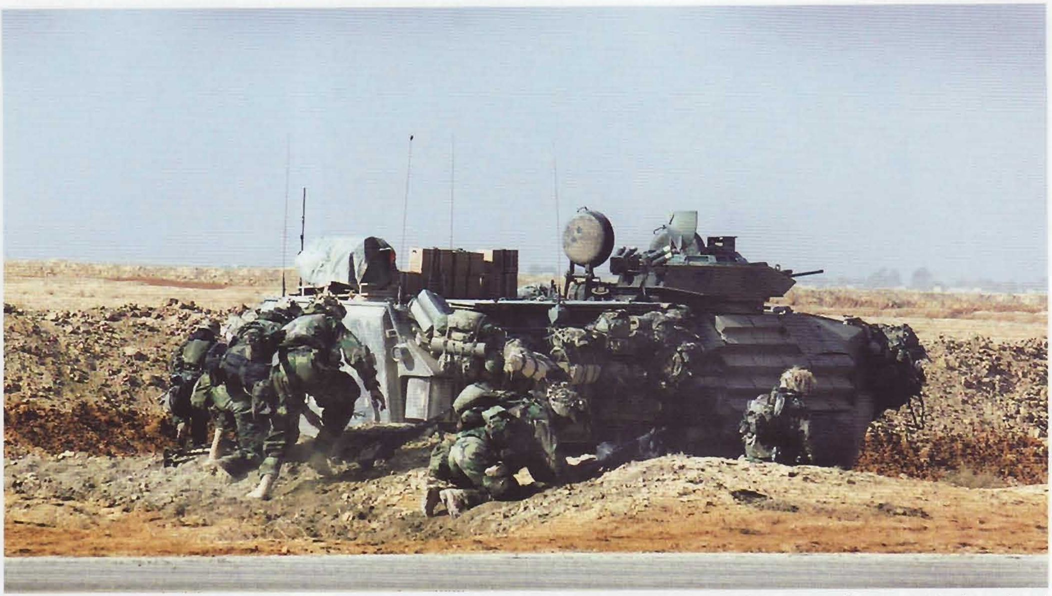
TF Tarawa in An Nasiriyah on 1 April. An M1045 TOW missile carrier Humvee festooned with extra crew gear front and rear races forward to support fellow Marines during a firefight in the city. As well as mounting a TOW missile launcher, a crewman mans an M240G 7.62mm machine gun, while another sits on the rear cargo hatch with an M16A2 assault rifle. (LCpl. Gordon A. Rouse, USMC)

Wednesday 2 April

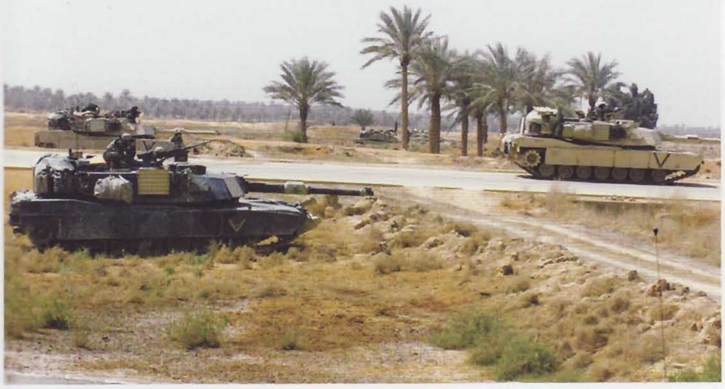
An attack near the town of Al Kut by Marines drove back the Baghdad Infantry Division and succeeded in capturing a bridge over the Tigris. By now this elite Iraqi division was severely degraded from a combination of constant bombardment from the air and ground. The I MEF advance had so far pushed through significant concentrations of regular Iraqi forces, though usually resistance tended to melt away after initial defeats.

The 1st MarDiv's spearhead along Highway 27 was made up of RCT-5, and through the night of 1 April they had raced towards An Numaniyah. Elements of 2nd Recon Battalion mounted in Humvees began assessing enemy strength at crossing points over the Tigris. As they attempted to secure a bridge, Marines were confronted by about sixty Iraqis in a fierce but short firefight in a village near An Numinayah. 3/5 Marines, supported by 2nd Tanks, succeeded in capturing intact the city's crucial concrete bridge over the Tigris at around 6:30 a.m., allowing them to continue their attack across the river. 2/5 Marines also exploited a dirt trail to seek out an alternative crossing point over the Tigris around 35km upstream of An Numaniyah. They maneuvered through mortar, RPG and small-arms fire, losing several vehicles in the process, but TF Bridge succeeded in establishing an additional crossing point and a pontoon bridge was laid. The entry of Marines onto the north bank of the Tigris effectively cut off the Baghdad Division from the capital, preventing them from withdrawing to help with its defense. By successfully crossing the Tigris, Marines were able to use Highway 6 as a direct route to Baghdad. Marine units amassed on the north bank of the Tigris, before rolling on towards the capital, with 3/7 Marines of RCT-7 earmarked to clear An Numaniyah, a city of 75,000 residents.

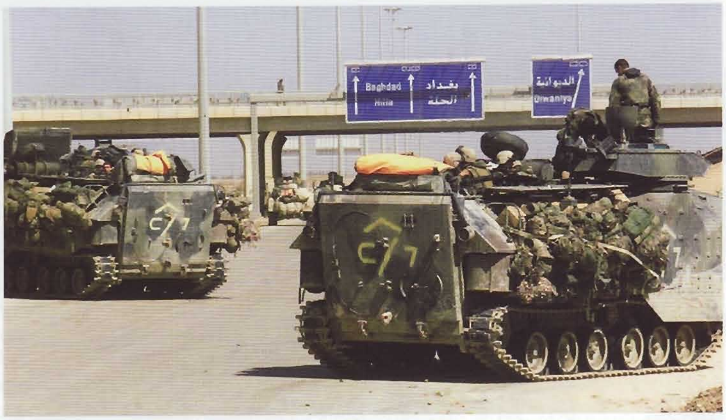
While Iraqis were desperately occupied with I MEF further east, the 3rd ID rushed through the so-called Karbala Gap. The Karbala Gap is a one-mile wide funnel point where the plain narrows between Lake Razazah and the town of Karbala, making it a natural chokepoint, ideal for defense and artillery kill zones. It was thought, if the Iraqis ever used chemical weapons, that this would be the most likely location. The 3rd ID had been preparing for this new phase of the attack over the preceding few days, and once through the Karbala Gap, they captured a bridge over the Euphrates and began making a beeline for Baghdad.



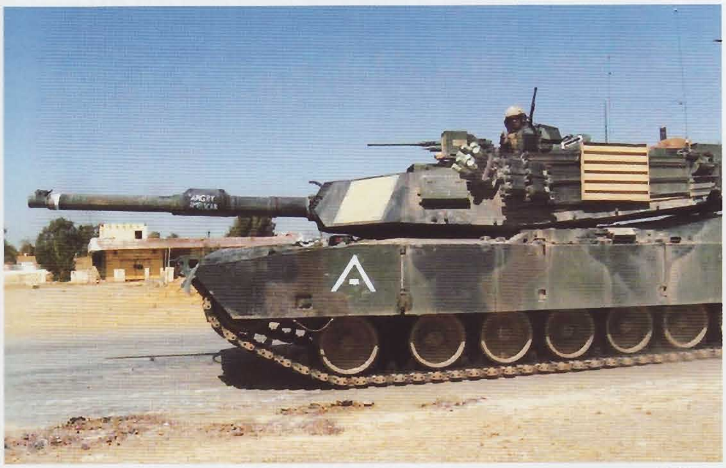
These Marines from Charlie Company, 1/5 Marines, dismount from their vehicles to conduct an attack on Iraqi positions on 1 April. The AAV belongs to 2nd Platoon, Charlie Company, 3rd AAB. Iraqis generally constructed extensive and well-planned defensive works surrounding their towns. It was in these trenches and defensive positions that Marines conducted the majority of their fighting outside major towns. They sought to avoid entering urban areas and getting bogged down in house-to-house fighting wherever possible. (Sgt. Kevin R. Reed, USMC)



There are five M1A1 tanks of Charlie Company, 1st Tanks, visible in this photo. They have taken up a defensive position north of the intersection between Highways 1 and 27 on 1 April, and each one carries CIPs. The BREs (Bustle Rack Extensions) fitted to the rear of M1A1 turrets are clearly seen in this photograph, and proved highly useful for carrying crew gear. (Sgt. Paul L. Anstine II, USMC)

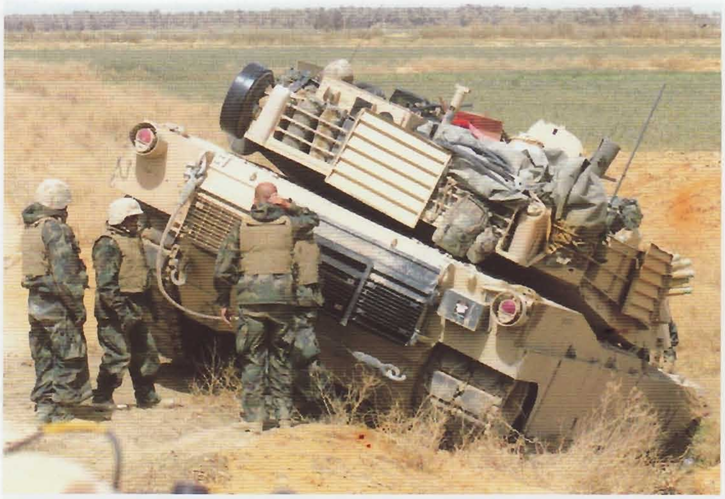


On a highway, AAVs assigned to Charlie Company, 1/7 Marines, are being refueled. The road signs indicate the direction of the Marines' ultimate destination – Baghdad! The flat terrain and paved highways in Iraq allowed American troops to advance in multiple columns, and their battlefield internet and GPS capabilities helped ensure they knew where other major elements were located. Each of these AAVs displays a brightly colored VS-17 aerial recognition panel on the roof. (LCpl. Kevin C. Quihuis Jr, USMC)



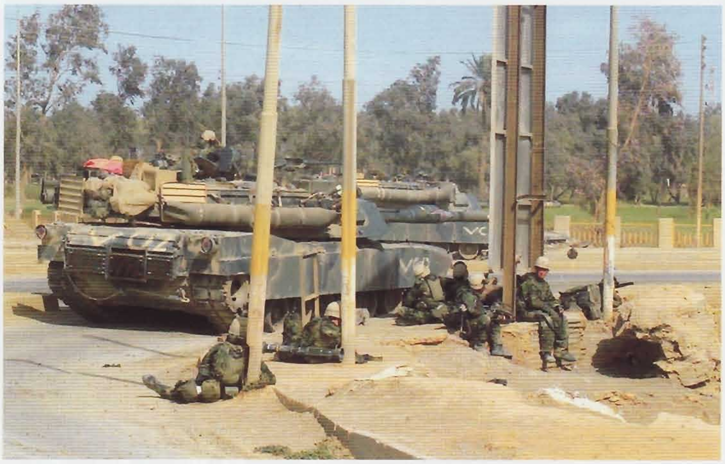
"Angry American", an M1A1 from Alpha Co, 1st Tanks, attached to RCT-1, overlooks the southern Iraqi city of Al Fay. The tank has sand-colored CIPs fitted on the sides and front of the turret. The 120mm M256mm smooth bore main gun firing MPAT (Multi-Purpose Anti-Tank) ammunition was highly effective in destroying enemy buildings, bunkers, armored vehicles and infantry. (Cpl. Mace M. Gratz, USMC)

These are troops of BLT 2/1, 15th MEU, in Az Zubayr. After finally capturing and securing an Iraqi naval facility, they return to their transport. The nearest Marine has a bracket on his helmet for fitting NVGs (Night Vision Goggles). Nighttime was generally used for conducting re-arm, re-supply, reconnoitering the next day's piece of road, and issuing orders. (LCpl. B. L. Wickliffe, USMC)

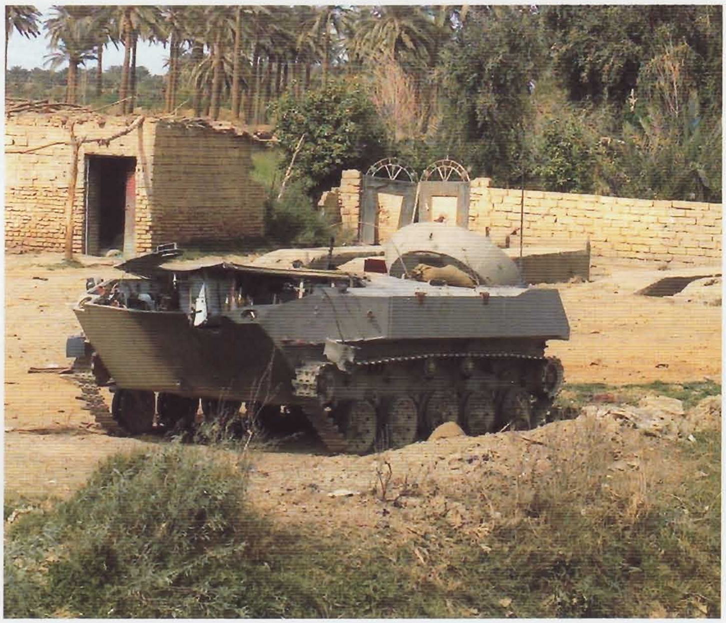


On 1 April this Abrams from Charlie Co, 1st Tanks, drove off the road into a soggy ditch north of the intersection of Highways 1 and 27, and became mired. Crewmembers evaluate their situation and await the company's M88 to help recover their vehicle. The long advance into Iraq and relatively small numbers of recovery vehicles meant that many platoon-level self-recovery operations were undertaken. This involves tanks being used to recover other tanks using tow cables or tow bars. However, this had the disadvantage of tying up needed combat power. The small box on the right rear of the hull contains the TI (Tank Infantry) phone. This TI phone allows dismounted personnel to communicate directly with the tank crew or utilize the tanks radios. (Sgt. Paul L. Anstine II, USMC)

In the distance is a 1st LAR Battalion LAV-AT with its TOW launcher erected on 2 April at the head of the assault. An aerial recognition device is draped over the launcher, while a fire burns in the background as other Marines hold Iraqis in civilian clothes under guard. (LCpl. Andrew P. Roufs, USMC)

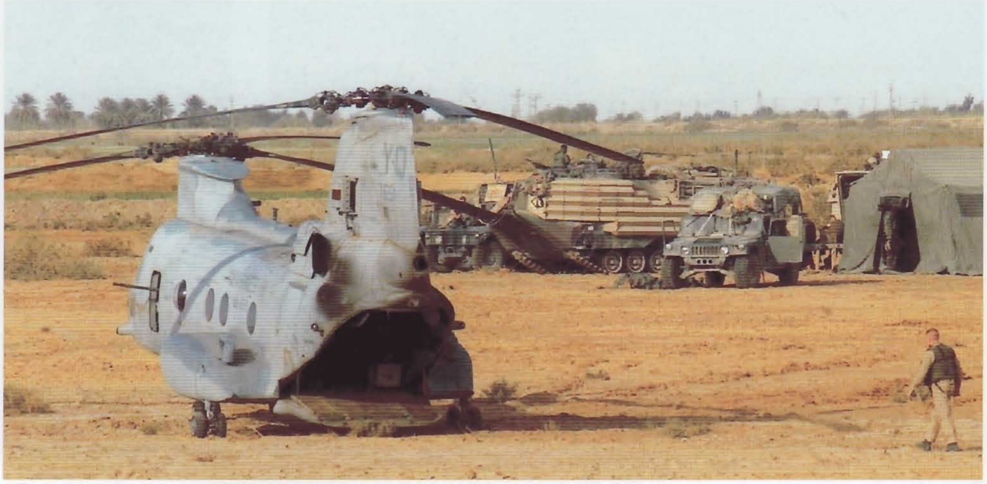


These Abrams tanks of Charlie Company, 2nd Tanks, set up a blocking position on a town street on 2 April. Accompanying Marines enjoy a few moments to rest beside the tanks during the pause. Tank commanders usually entered combat exposed from the chest up in their open hatches to better acquire targets and direct the driver. They would usually keep a rifle handy up top for close-in defense against dismounted enemy troops. In these instances, a rifle was more maneuverable and responsive than the tanks' mounted machine guns. (LCpl. Andrew P. Roufs, USMC)



Delta Company of 1st LAR Battalion passed by this completely destroyed Iraqi BMD-1 on 2 April. The Soviet BMD-1 was designed as an airborne combat vehicle and was first seen in public in 1973. It has a crew of three and carries four infantrymen. It employs a 73mm main gun and co-axial 7.62mm machine gun in the same turret as that found on the BMP-1. In each corner of the bow is an extra 7.62mm machine gun, though this vehicle's have been removed. With a combat weight of 7,500kg, the BMD-1 is fully amphibious. (LCpl. Andrew P. Roufs, USMC)

A CH-46E Sea Knight helicopter rests beside a road and a temporary base on 2 April. These twin-rotor helicopters transport a maximum of fourteen combat troops, or fifteen medical patients with two accompanying medical attendants. The first USMC CH-46E entered service in 1964, and production ceased in 1977 with the 624th craft delivered. Despite a vigorous maintenance program and several SLEPs (Service Life Extension Program), the CH-46E fleet is worn out and due to be replaced by the V-22 Osprey when it enters service. (LCpl. Andrew P. Roufs, USMC)



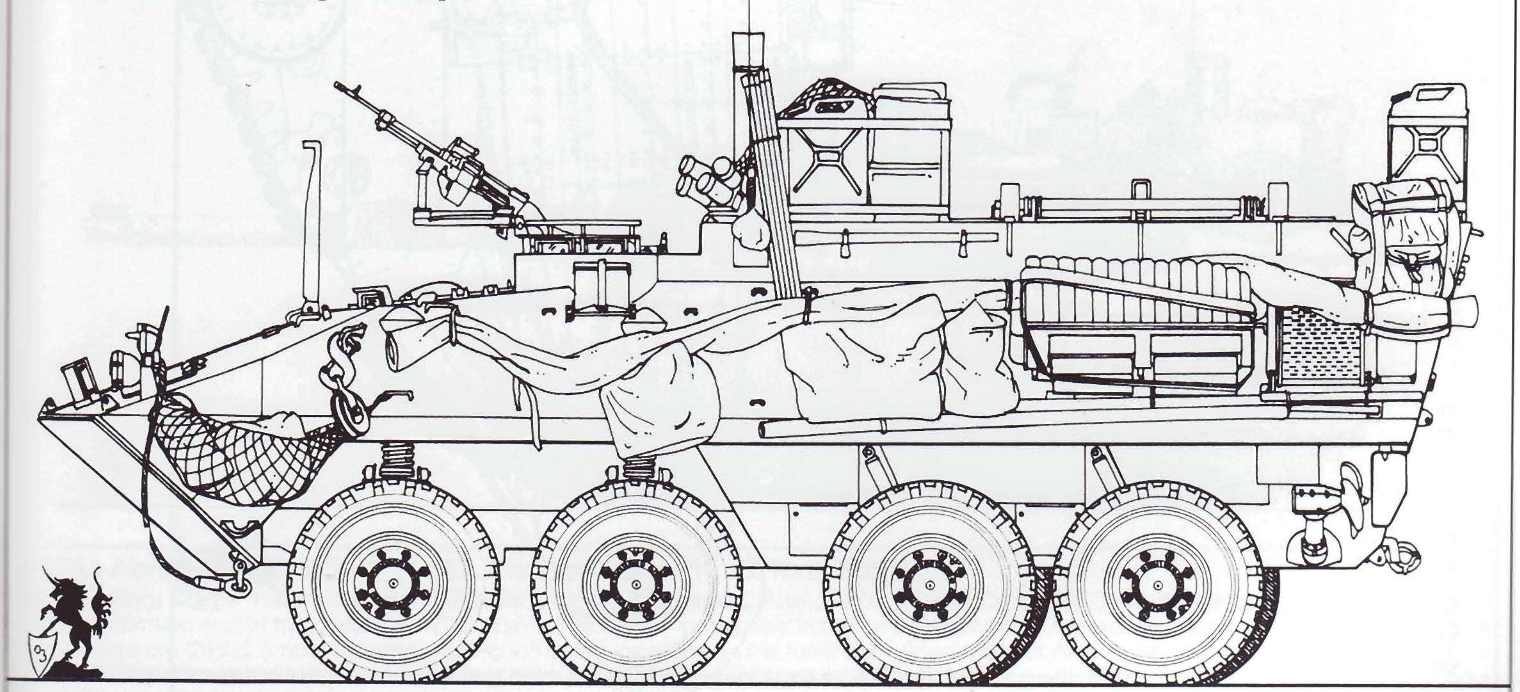
Fox Battery of 2/11 Marines sets up some of their M198 howitzers for a fire mission. This hefty howitzer weighs 7,154kg and requires a crew of eleven to operate effectively. It can hurl a standard 155mm HE shell out to a distance of 22.4km. The howitzer has a high center of balance making it susceptible to tipping over when towed too quickly over rough terrain. Artillery was effectively used to beat the path ahead of the leading units of the advance. (Sgt. Kevin R. Reed, USMC)

Tanks of Charlie Company, 1st Tank Battalion, are arrayed on Highway 27 heading northeast as they continue the strike towards the all important capital on 2 April. The Textron Lycoming AGT1500 gas turbine power pack of an M1A1 can gulp down up to 4.75 liters of JP-8 diesel fuel per kilometer, and it holds 1,907 liters in its fuel tanks. (Sgt. Paul L. Anstine II, USMC)

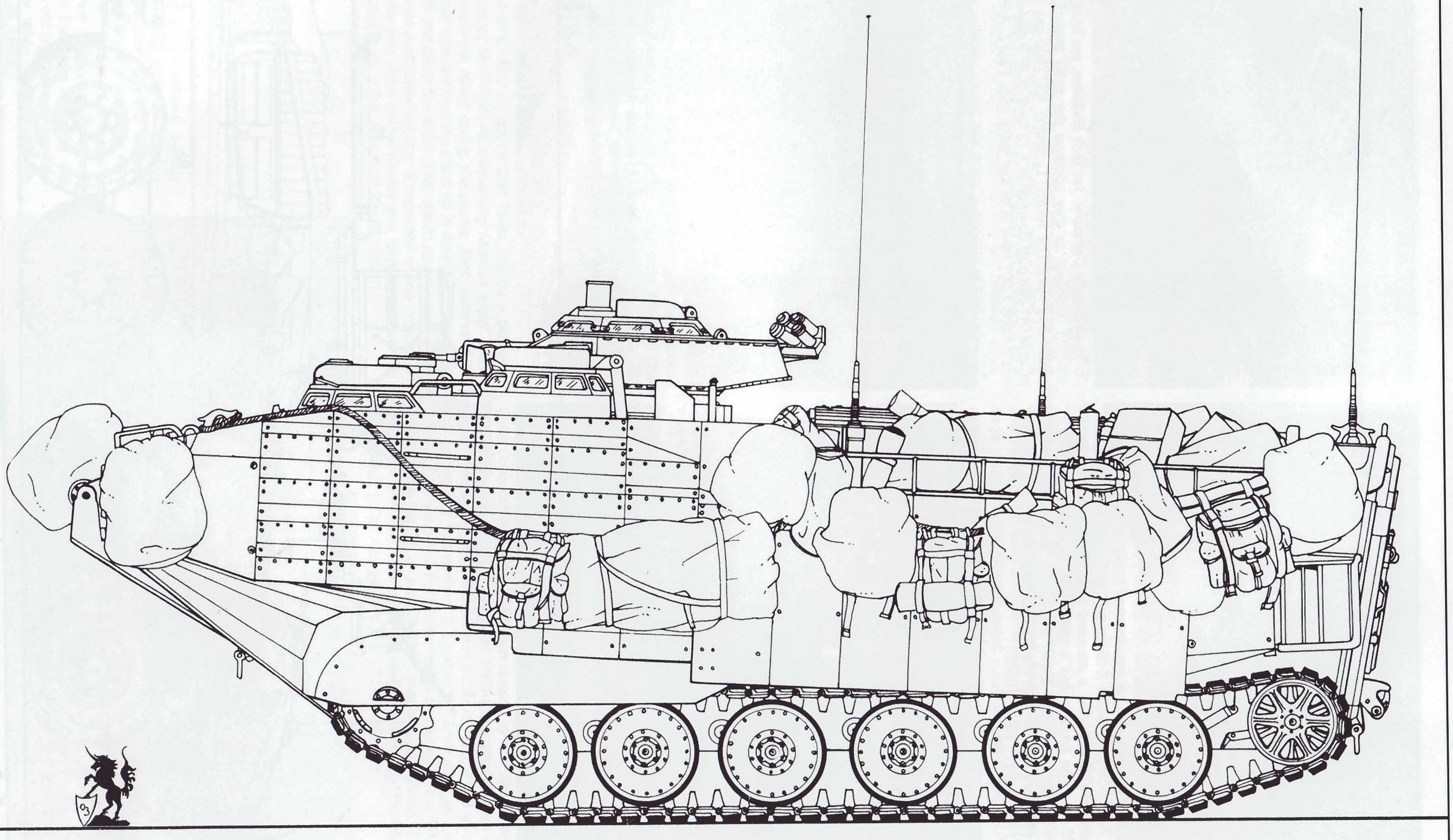
A T-55 with 100mm gun blazes after being destroyed in an unevenly matched tank engagement with M1A1s. The photo was taken along Highway 27 north of the An Numaniyah Bridge after the Tigris was crossed on 2 April. The Soviet-manufactured T-55 has a combat weight of 36,000kg. (Sgt. Paul L. Anstine II, USMC)

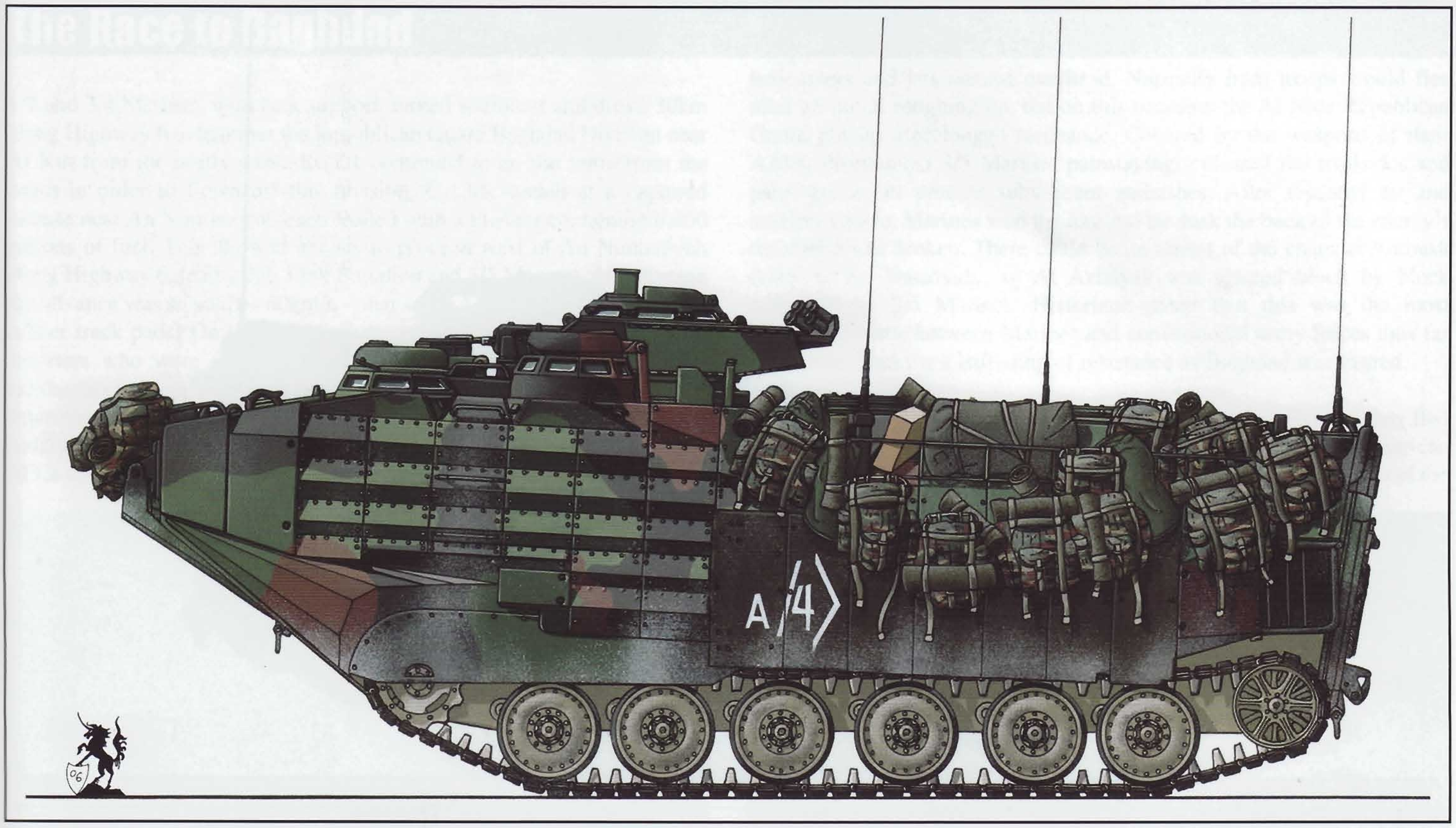
Scouts cautiously approach the blazing remains of an Iraqi BMP that now rests in an irrigation canal. Delta Company, 1st LAR Battalion, blew up the APC on 2 April. Large areas of the Iraqi landscape around the Euphrates and Tigris are crisscrossed by this kind of irrigation channel, and they claimed more than one unwary American driver. (LCpl. Andrew P. Roufs, USMC)

1:35 LAV-L (Logistics)



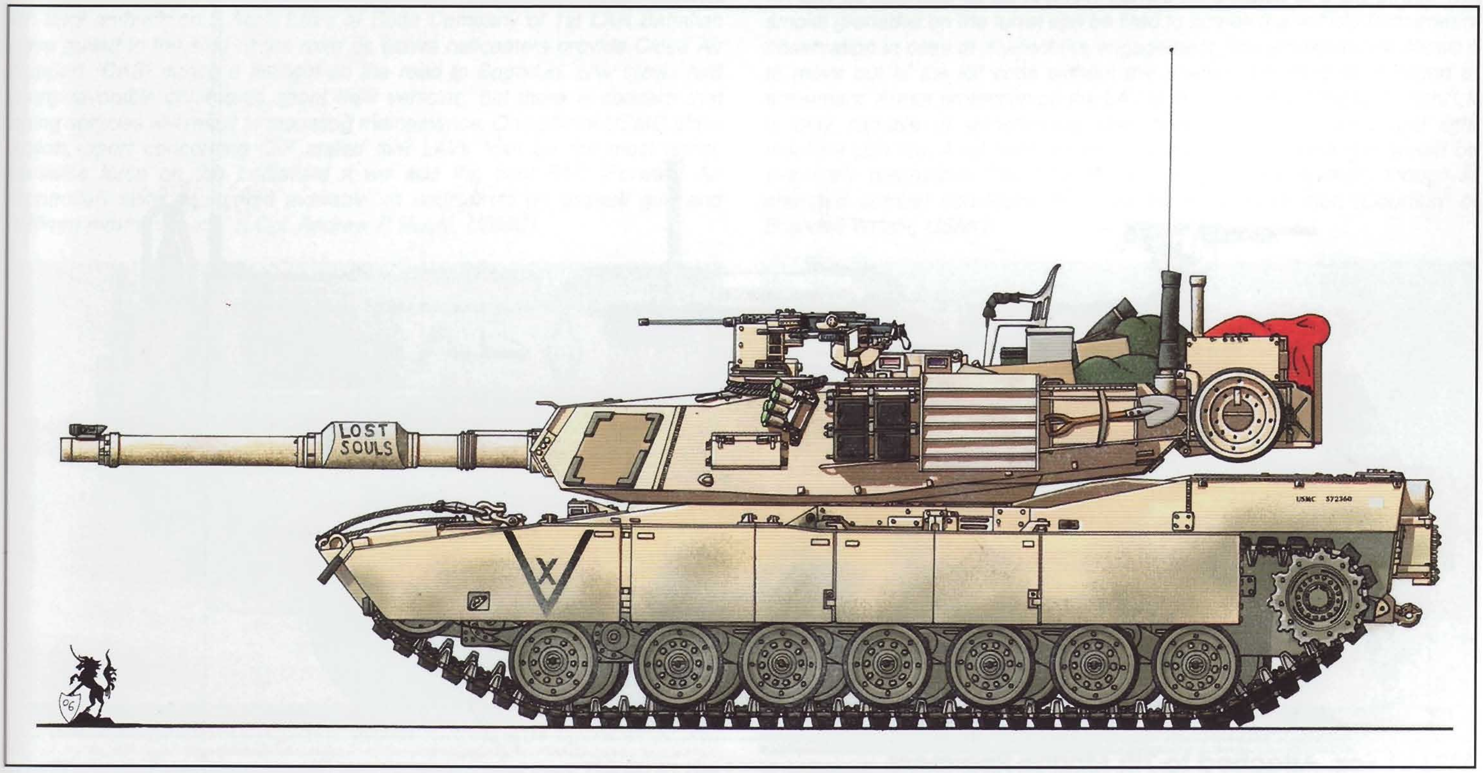
1:35 AAVP7A1





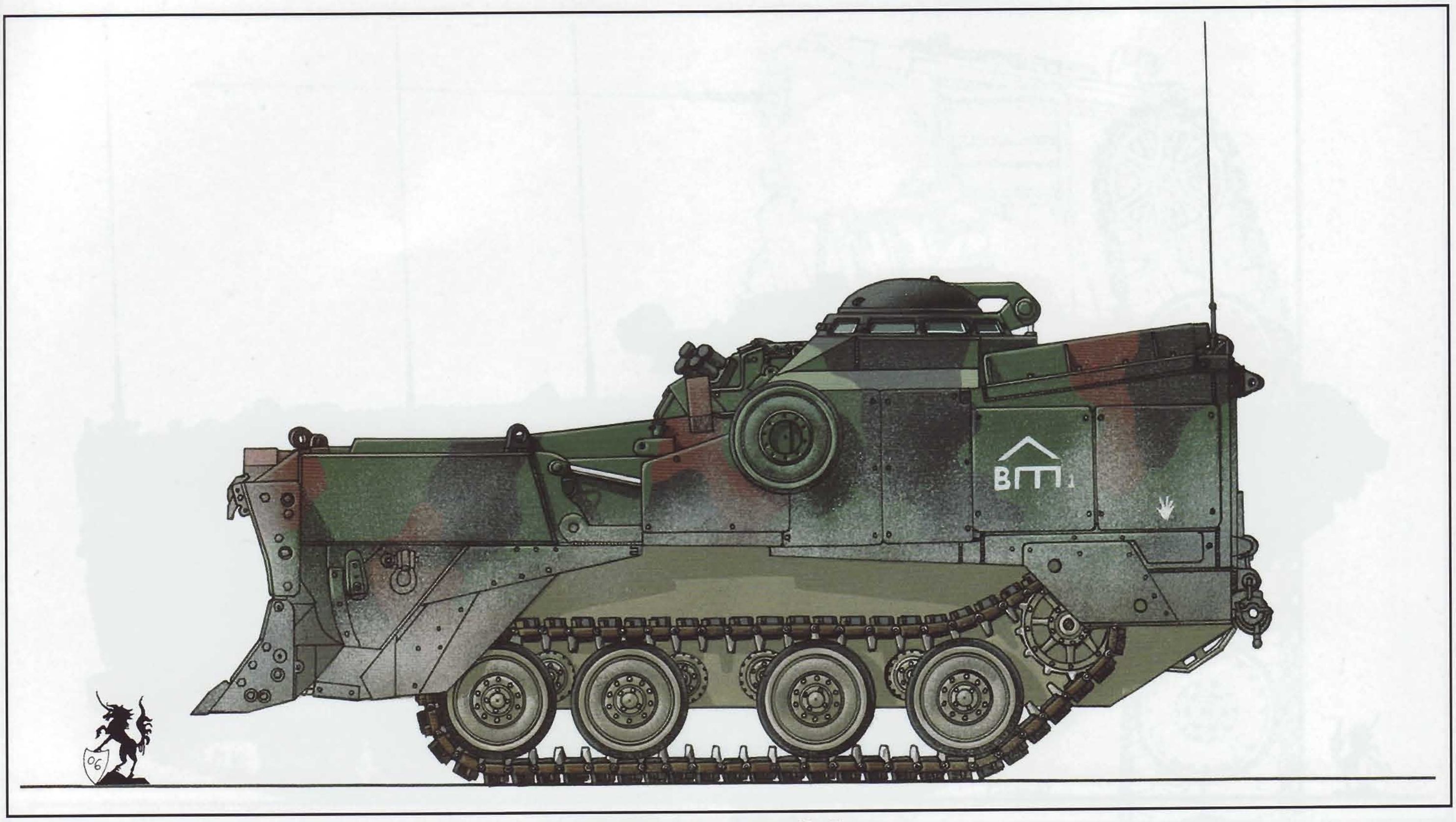
AAVP7A1, assigned to 2nd Platoon, Alpha Company, 1/4 Marines

An AAVP7A1 "Tuna Boat" is decked out in a three-tone NATO green, brown and black camouflage paint scheme. A range of markings was used on USMC Amtracs during OIF, sometimes confusingly so. The markings denote that the Marines embarked on this vehicle are from 2nd Platoon (denoted by the right-facing chevron), Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment. The same markings were also supposed to be applied to the turret sides and the exterior of the rear ramp. Note the huge amount of gear stowed on the sides. This vehicle can comfortably carry twelve to fifteen combat equipped passengers, though if you ask a crewman there is always room for "one more". Its advertised load is twenty-five.



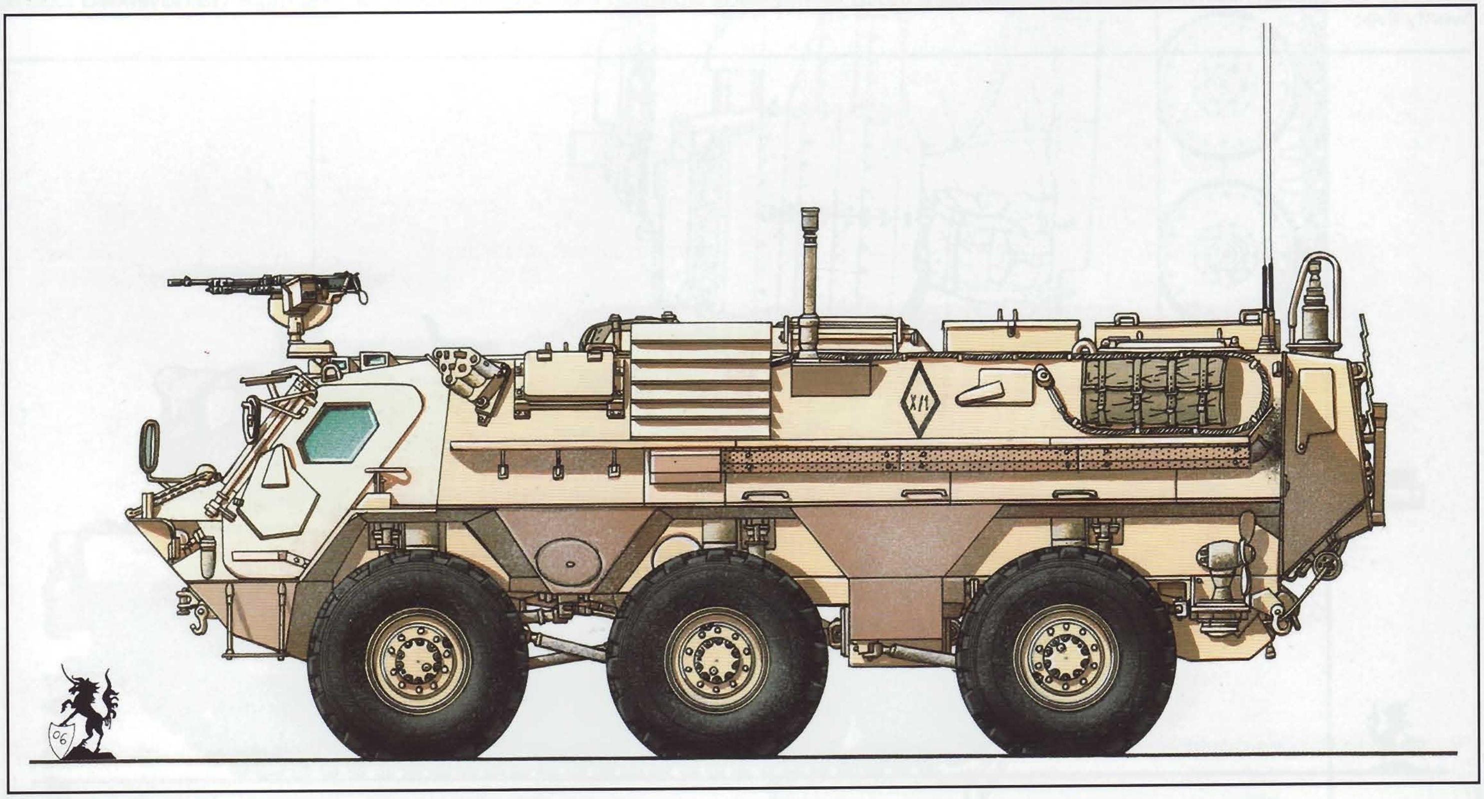
M1A1 Abrams, "LOST SOULS", C-42, Charlie Company, 1st Tank Battalion

The markings on this Abrams reveal that it belongs to the Executive Officer (XO) of Charlie Company. Other XO's tanks of the battalion were similarly marked in that they had the "X" for "Executive Officer" positioned in the open end of their respective company's chevron on the side skirts. There are CIPs (Combat Identification Panel) at five locations on the turret front, sides and rear. An orange colored VS-17 aerial recognition panel is draped over the turret bustle rack that holds the EAPU (External Auxiliary Power Unit), along with the accoutrements of war (for example, a plastic chair!).



M9 ACE, 1st Platoon, Bravo Company, 1st Combat Engineer Battalion

The markings on this dusty M9 ACE (Armored Combat Earthmover) identify it as belonging to 1st Platoon, Bravo Company of the 1st Combat Engineer Battalion (CEB). The rotated "E" is the NATO tactical map symbol for an engineer unit. Note also the "white hand" applied at the bottom rear corner of the side – this symbol represents Saruman, the white wizard of Lord of the Rings fame. The M9 ACE is painted in a typical NATO camouflage scheme of green, brown and black. Many towed a Mine Clearing Line Charge (MICLIC) system trailer behind them as they supported the assault into Iraq.



M93A1 Fox, Attached to 7th Marine Regiment

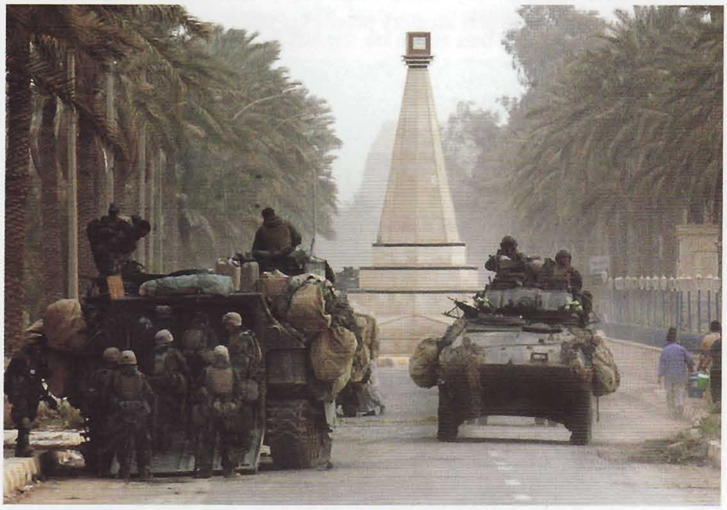
This German manufactured 6x6 vehicle is rated as probably the best battlefield nuclear and chemical contaminant-detecting vehicle in the world. Both sand color and NATO three color green, brown and black camouflage painted vehicles served during OIF 1. The Fox was a I MEF asset and assigned to subordinate units. This vehicle bears the "diamond" markings of an HQ unit. Because of a limited number of such assets within the USMC, many of these vehicles were borrowed from the U.S. Army for OIF. The Fox's armament includes an M240 7.62mm machine gun mounted on the right front of the hull and smoke grenade launchers for self-screening. Note the CIP mounted on the side of this specialist vehicle.

Thursday 3 April

1/7 and 3/4 Marines, with tank support, turned southeast and drove 30km along Highway 6 to hammer the Republican Guard Baghdad Division near Al Kut from the north, while RCT-1 continued to do the same from the south in order to finish off this division. C-130s landed at a captured airbase near An Numaniyah, each loaded with a bladder containing 6,000 gallons of fuel. This allowed attacks to proceed west of An Numaniyah along Highway 6, led by 2nd Tank Battalion and 3/5 Marines. At one stage the advance was so swift – 60km/h – that some AAVs were shedding their rubber track pads! On the way they passed streams of hundreds of Iraqi deserters who were intent on heading south. The prevailing mood of exhilaration changed somewhat when they ran into a large force of determined troops of the Al Nida Republican Guard Division defending Al Aziziyah along Highway 6 at 1 p.m. Fighting there against Iraqi tanks, APCs and mechanized infantry lasted much of the day, while Cobra attack helicopters and jets buzzed overhead. Normally Iraqi troops would flee after an initial roughing up, but on this occasion the Al Nida Republican Guard put up a prolonged resistance. Covered by the weapons of their AAVs, dismounted 3/5 Marines painstakingly cleared the roadsides and palm groves to prevent subsequent ambushes. After repeated air and artillery strikes, Marines won the day and by dusk the back of the enemy's resistance was broken. There could be no repeat of the chaos at Ambush Alley at An Nasiriyah., so Al Aziziyah was cleared block by block overnight by 3/5 Marines. Historians stated that this was the most significant battle between Marines and conventional army forces thus far in the war, marking a stiffening of resistance as Baghdad was neared.

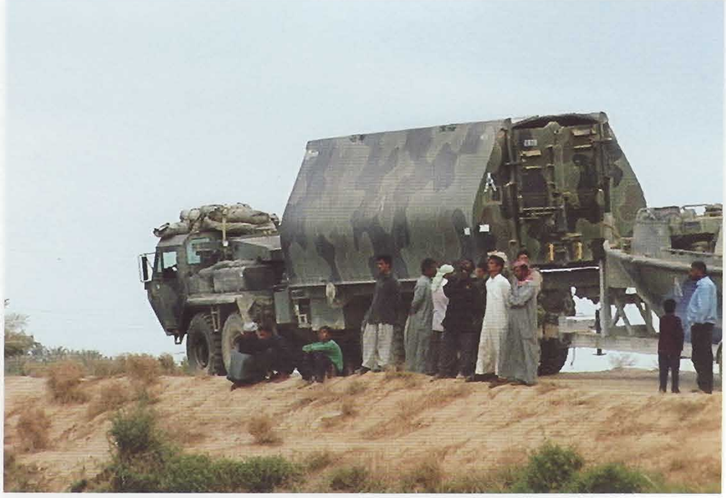
Iraqi forces were again retreating north toward Baghdad. Even as they fled northwest they fell victim to the ever-present surveillance of American UAVs and preying bombers. By nightfall Marines were within 40km of the

An Iraqi ambush on 3 April. LAVs of Delta Company of 1st LAR Battalion have pulled to the side of the road as Cobra helicopters provide Close Air Support (CAS) during a firefight on the road to Baghdad. LAV crews had many favorable comments about their vehicles, but there is concern that aging vehicles will result in mounting maintenance. One official USMC after-action report concerning OIF stated that LAVs "can be the most lethal, versatile force on the battlefield if we add the best FAC (Forward Air Controller) suite equipment available, in addition to an assault gun and 120mm mortar variant." (LCpl. Andrew P. Roufs, USMC)



An LAV-25 approaches an AAV7A1 parked on the side of a city street. The smoke grenades on the turret can be fired to screen the vehicle from enemy observation in case of a direct fire engagement. The smokescreen allows it to move out of the kill zone without the enemy observing its direction of movement. Armor protection on the LAV is minimal, hence the term "light". It is only capable of withstanding shell fragments, small arms and light machine gun fire. A hit from an anti-tank weapon or a tank gun would be extremely destructive. The LAV-25 can carry six infantrymen, though in cramped combat conditions this may be reduced to four. (Courtesy of Brandon Wright, USMC)

A mud and dust encrusted Abrams patrols along a rural road. The M1A1 has a maximum road speed of 68km/h and has a maximum range of 426km. Iraqi defenders tended to engage tanks only when they were at close range. This meant that when the tank returned fire, all of its weapons could range the target and be used. Coils of razor wire are carried on the tank's rear, used for self-protection when halted for extended periods of time, or as a hasty EPW collection point. (Sgt. Kevin R. Reed, USMC)



A MK48-18 Ribbon Bridge Transporter tows a trailer with a BEB (Bridge Erection Boat) on the banks of the Tigris River on 4 April. BEBs are used to assemble the floating ribbon bridge and do not mount any weapons. There were a number of Oshkosh MK48 LVS trucks and other types left broken down on the side of the road during the main advance because there were few or no spare parts available to repair them. (LCpl. James P. Aguilar, USMC) capital as they pursued attacks east of the Tigris. On the same day at 7:30 p.m., the 1st Brigade of the 3rd ID reached Saddam International Airport on the western outskirts of Baghdad.

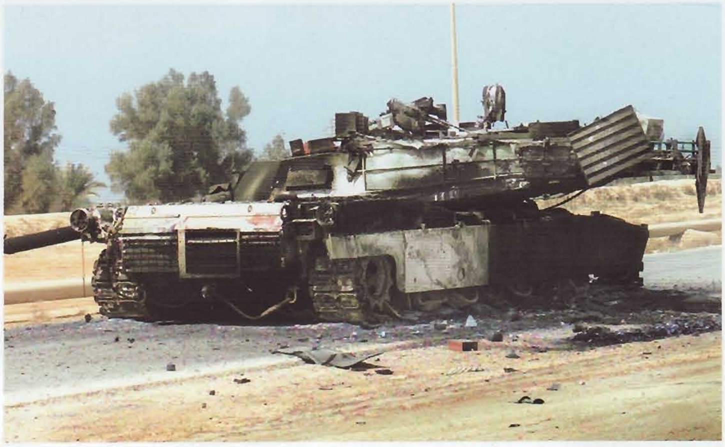
Friday 4 April

At 1100 hours, 2nd Tanks set out at the head of RCT-5 towards Baghdad along Highway 6. Shortly after, irregular forces, including a concentration of foreign volunteer forces predominantly from Syria and Egypt, confronted Marines near Al Muhaydias Salih, north of Al Aziziyah, just 32km from Baghdad. This "gun-and-run" confrontation with several hundred *jihadis* and remnants of the Al Nida Republican Guard was known as "61 Easting", referring to the site's map coordinates. Iraqis lining the highway popped up to shoot as vehicles passed by before lying low again. A number of Marine vehicles were hit, and two tanks were knocked out in the bruising encounter. It required several hours of intense fighting by 3/5 Marines in the marshes beside the 4km stretch of road to finally silence the opposition. In the process a well-stocked terrorist camp was captured. All the way along Highway 6 leading to Baghdad, the carcasses of Iraqi tanks and artillery pieces lay smoldering, victims of U.S. aerial, tank and artillery fire. RCT-5 moved further north on Route Green to swing around the eastern outskirts of Baghdad, while RCT-7 would strike directly along Highway 6. A large contingent of 2,500 troops of the Baghdad Division surrendered to Marines on the road north from Al Aziziyah.

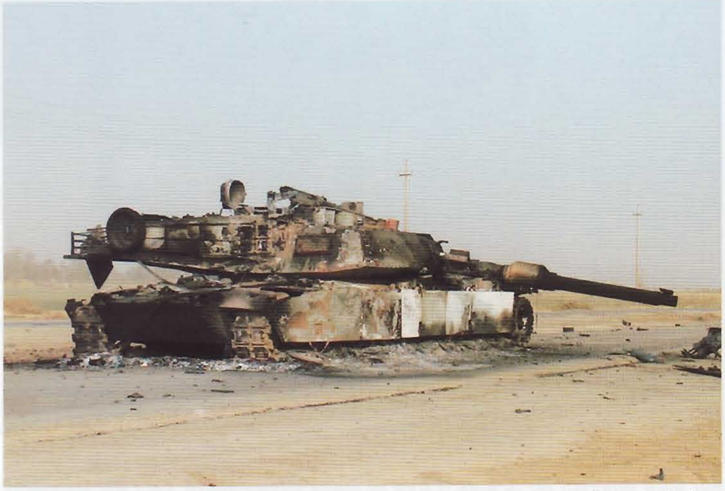
The 3rd ID was firmly established on the southern outskirts of Baghdad after having captured several key intersections. Iraqis counterattacked the renamed Baghdad International Airport in the morning, and American units came face-to-face with numerous fanatic teenage *fedayeen*, most of whom were killed. By morning, 75% of the airport had been captured and Iraqi troops were fighting in isolated pockets.

Saturday 5 April

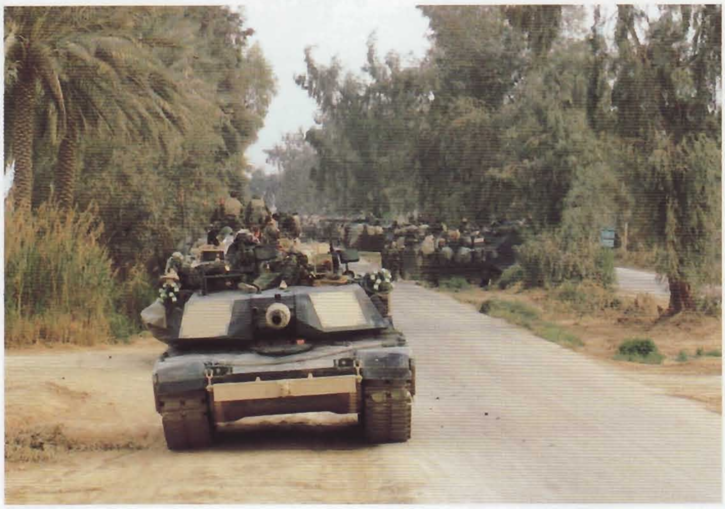
I MEF continued its attack northwest towards Baghdad along Highway 6, dealing with elements of the Al Nida Republican Guard Division as they went. For the past 36 hours, Marines had been engaged in dismounted hand-to-hand fighting as they converged on the capital. I MEF in the east and the 3rd ID in the west were poised in front of Baghdad, but there were



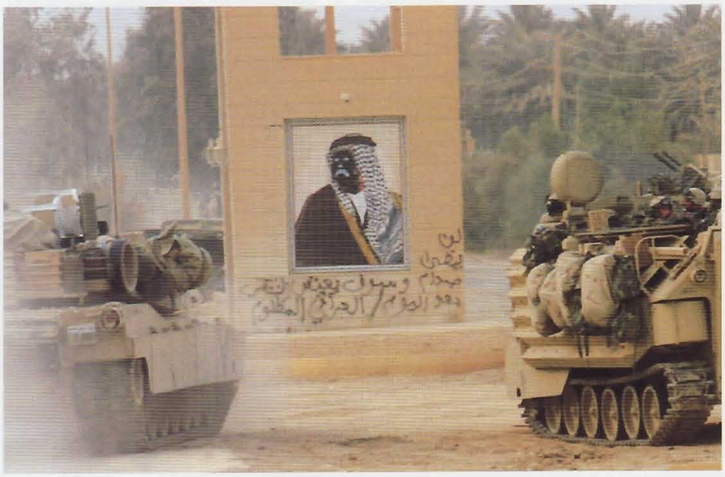
The remains of a completely burnt out M1A1 from 2nd Tank Battalion lie on the median strip of Highway 1, photographed on 5 April. In the assault on Iraq there was not a single catastrophic loss of an M1A1 Abrams due to Iraqi direct-fire or indirect-fire weapons. Although several tanks were destroyed, this was due to secondary effects from enemy weapon systems such as externally loaded supplies catching fire. The majority of M1A1 losses were attributed to mechanical breakdowns, plus the fact that there were few or no repair parts being pushed forward from Kuwait. The crew, to prevent it falling into enemy hands, deliberately destroyed this tank. (LCpl. Jennifer Krusen, USMC)



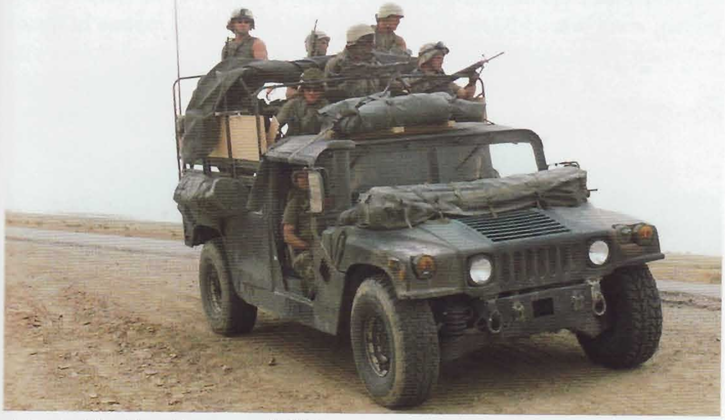
Another view from the opposite side of the knocked out M1A1. It lies adjacent to a fedayeen camp outside Jaman Al Juburi, and provides a good study for modelers wishing to depict a destroyed M1A1 tank. The intense heat of the fire has melted the aluminum road wheels and caused the spring steel of the torsion bars to lose their strength, thus allowing the bottom of the hull to rest on the pavement. (GySgt. Erik S. Hansen, USMC)



Columns of Abrams and AAVs of Charlie Company, 1st Tank Battalion, stage near Salman Pak on 6 April. The lead tank carries the two typical USMC pattern smoke grenade launchers either side of the turret, each armed with a full complement of eight grenades. The Abrams' frontal turret and hull armor provided excellent crew protection. However, like all tanks, the top, side, and rear armor remain susceptible to penetration by even handheld anti-tank weapons. (Sgt. Paul L. Anstine II, USMC)



On 6 April an M1A1 tank and AAV belonging to Charlie Company of 1st Tanks rolls imperiously past an unflattering mural of Saddam Hussein near the town of Salman Pak. Such self-edifying monuments to Saddam were found everywhere throughout Iraq, many being defaced by Iraqis or knocked down by coalition troops. During the campaign, Iraqi troops usually waited until M1 tanks were close, sometimes within a hundred meters, before opening up with machine-guns and RPG-7s (Rifle-Propelled Grenade). In these types of situations, the tank commander' .50-cal machine-gun was particularly devastating, tearing up the enemy and whatever cover he thought was protecting him. (Sgt. Paul L. Anstine II, USMC)

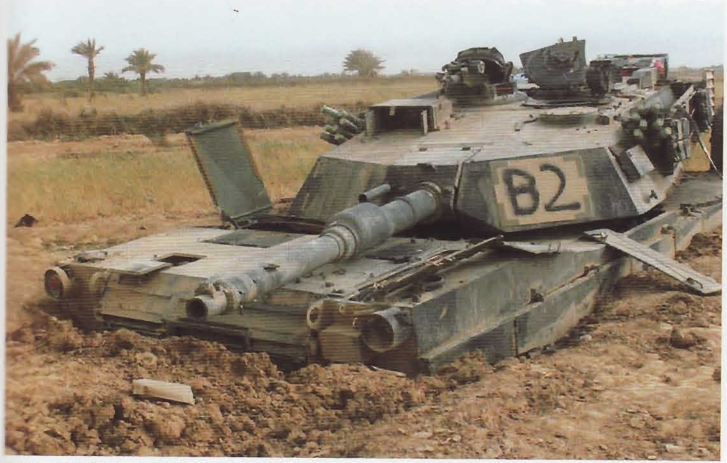


A typical looking Humvee of OIF passes by a vehicle checkpoint set up by Marines on 6 April. It is a two-door M998 variant with a soft-top. Though it is loaded with alert Marines, they have absolutely no protection if caught in an ambush. Such vehicles would all be either up-armored or replaced by armored versions when Marines returned for OIF 2. This vehicle is attached to H&S (Headquarters and Support) Co, BLT, 2/2 Marines, 24th MEU. (SSgt. Bryan P. Reed, USMC)

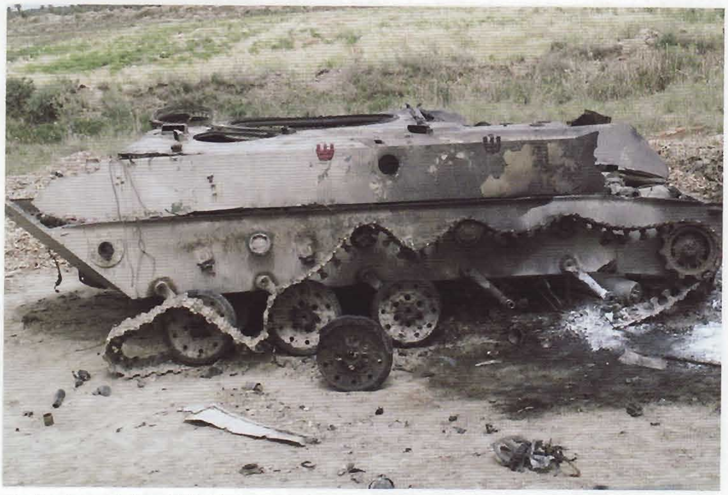
only 20,000 U.S. troops in position to capture a city of nearly 5 million people! Task Force 1-64 of the 3rd ID conducted its first "Thunder Run" into the center of Baghdad with Abrams and Bradleys. It was dubbed a "reconnaissance in force", designed to smoke out the enemy and ascertain their will to fight, as well as to shake up Iraqi confidence. Indeed it was a brash show of force considering the previous difficulties encountered in urban centers like An Nasiriyah and An Najaf, when thin lines of troops had been bitterly assaulted in urban terrain. The first Thunder Run resulted in an estimated 1,000-3,000 Iraqi soldiers killed. Meanwhile, a raid by 1st Tank Battalion and 3/7 Marines destroyed a terrorist training camp near Salman Pak.

Sunday 6 April

Marines of RCT-5 conducted aggressive reconnaissance patrols to find a suitable place to cross the Diyala River, a 60-meter wide tributary of the Euphrates that curls around Baghdad's eastern perimeter. Downstream to the southeast, Marines of RCT-7 were working to cross a pair of 150-yard bridges over the Diyala River on Highway 6. The narrower southern crossing point was a two-lane steel truss road bridge that was on the avenue of approach for 3/4 Marines. It had a ten-foot hole blown in it, but could be crossed on foot if planks were laid. The larger four-lane concrete bridge that carried Highway 6 into Baghdad lay along 1st Tank Battalion's route into the capital. Its fifty-foot wide center span had been badly damaged in a failed Iraqi demolition attempt to drop the bridge into the river to prevent it from being crossed. It would take an engineering effort to get 1st Tanks' vehicles across.



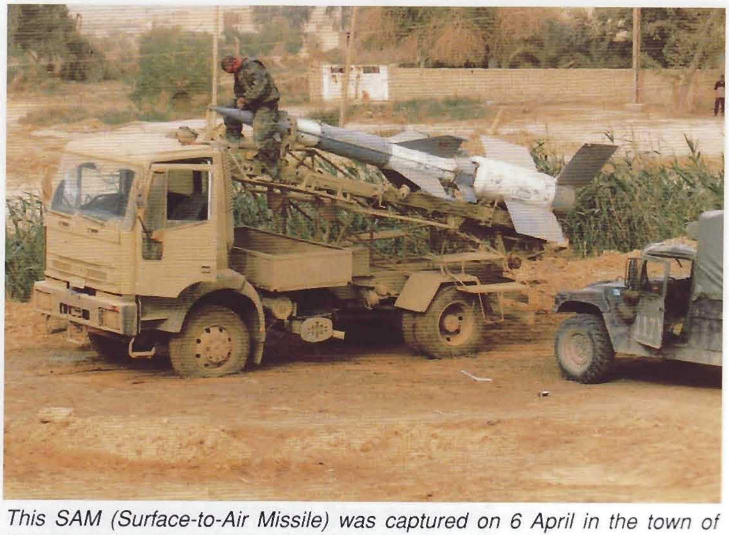
This M1A1 is totally bogged down near Sayyid Abid on 6 April approaching Baghdad. The hastily spray-painted "B2" marking reveals that it belongs to Bravo Company of 2nd Tank Battalion. Sensitive equipment such as weapons, radios and personal gear has been removed. When tanks broke down or could not be recovered quickly, they would be left for following support units to retrieve. This tank was recovered by CSSB-18 and returned to 2nd Tanks before mid-April. (MSgt Buzz Farrell, USMC)



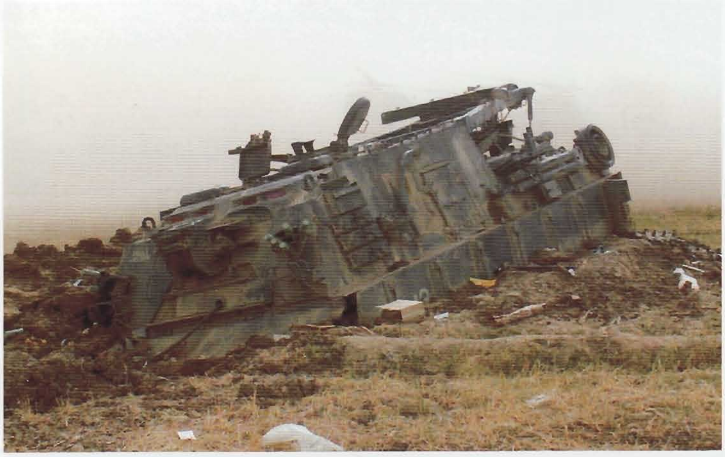
A destroyed Iraqi BMD-1 sits abjectly beside the road near Al Numaniyah after a one-sided encounter with Marines. In working order, this nimble vehicle would be capable of 70km/h on roads and 10km/h in water. (LCpl. Alicia Anderson, USMC)

Once across the Diyala, the Marines would be less than 15km from the heart of Baghdad. But now they faced sharp fighting as Iraqi defenders on the northern bank of the river fired tank guns, artillery rounds, RPGs, recoilless rifles, heavy machine guns and anti-aircraft guns in the direct fire mode at their foes on the southern bank. The Marines countered with tank main guns, mortar, artillery, machine gun and rifle fire, supplemented by heavy doses of "rockets and guns" from supporting Cobra helicopters. To push heavy vehicles across the southern Diyala crossing in the sector of 3/4 Marines would require specialized engineers to lay a pontoon bridge. At 1st Tanks' crossing point, an extensive minefield astride Highway 6 also had to be breached to reach the approaches to the bridge.

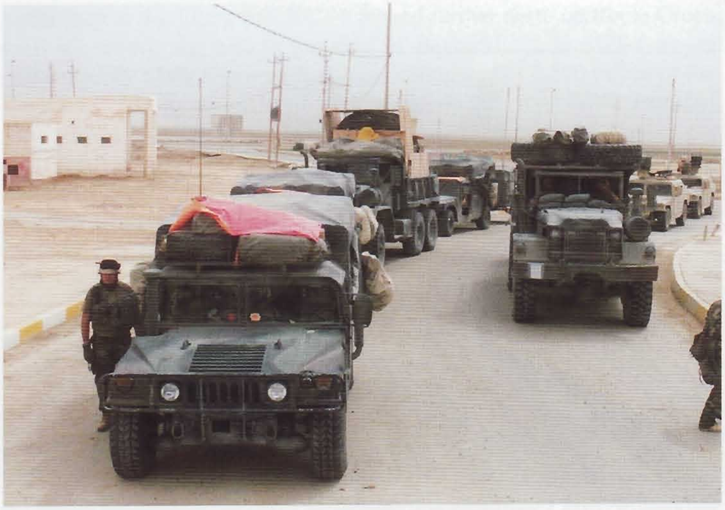
Further south, Challenger II tanks and Warrior IFVs of the 7th UK Armoured Brigade forced their way into Basra at dawn along three main avenues. The lead-up to the British entry into Basra had been slow and deliberate, but now they employed the Irish Guards and Black Watch Regiment to stabilize the city.



This SAM (Surface-to-Air Missile) was captured on 6 April in the town of Salman Pak, adjacent to an Iraqi secret police and Special Forces training center. The missile is mounted on a commercial Iveco truck chassis, and is the subject of a detailed examination by a member of CSSC-117, as revealed by the markings on the door of his HMMWV. (Sgt. Paul L. Anstine II, USMC)



This is the hulk of a USMC M88A2 belonging to Bravo Company, 2nd Tank Battalion. The knocked out VTR (Vehicle, Tracked, Recovery) was photographed on 6 April near Sayyid Abd, halfway between Al Kut and Baghdad. This vehicle is usually fitted with an M2 HB machine gun and AT-4 rockets for self-defense. The M88A2 is an excellent recovery asset, though it always seemed there were never enough of them given the number of tanks operating and the long distances being traveled. (MSgt. Buzz Farrell, USMC)



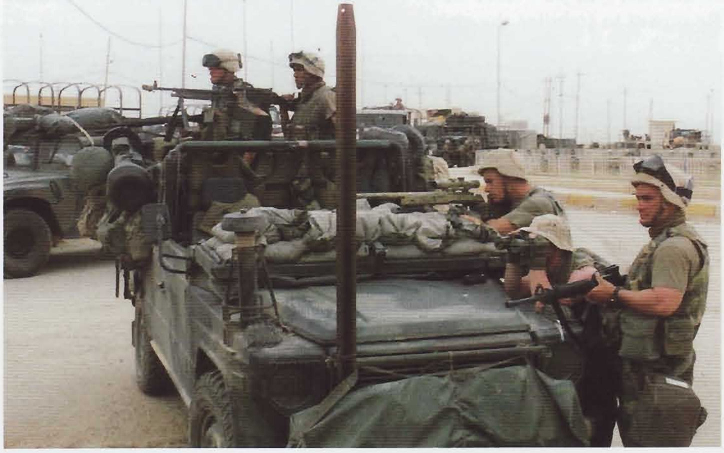
This photo was taken on 7 April in Qalat Sukar, a town along the road north between An Nasiriyah and Al Kut. The photo shows members of Echo Company, BLT 2/2, 24th MEU. The unit has secured the town but continues to keep an eye out for enemy stragglers. Their vehicles include a selection of hardback and soft-back Humvees and older 5-ton M817 dump trucks serving as cargo carriers. (SSgt. Bryan P. Reed, USMC)

Monday 7 April

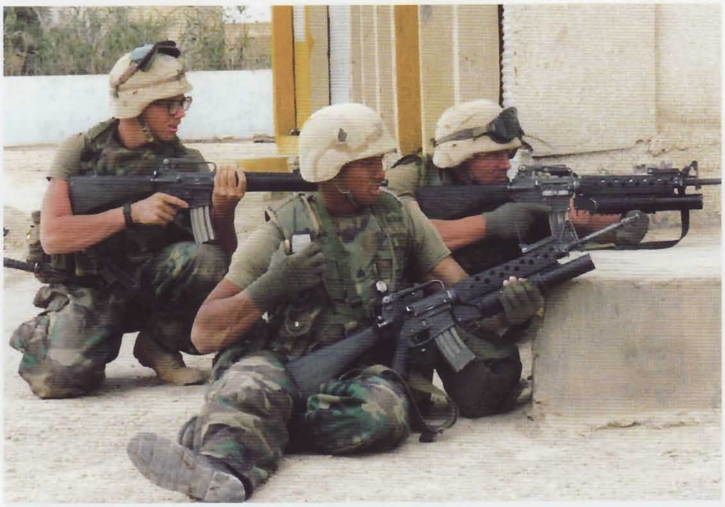
The 3rd Infantry Division's 2nd Brigade conducted a second Thunder Run into the heart of Baghdad to again test the defenses. This reconnaissance was conducted against ferocious resistance, with Iraqi attacks being likened by American soldiers to Japanese *banzai* charges. This time the troops would boldly occupy the city center, spending the night in the sanctum of Saddam's Republican Palace. This brigade of 5,000 U.S. troops took up residence in the heart of the city, a position they would not be dislodged from.

Marines were busy on the eastern outskirts of Baghdad, isolating the capital from the east along the Diyala River. After an all-night firefight with Iraqi units on the west bank of the Diyala, 1st Tank Battalion conducted re-arm and re-supply while still in contact and under enemy fire. 1st Tanks brought forward one of their organic AVLBs (Armored Vehicle Launched Bridge) and did an assault crossing into Baghdad, in so doing gaining the honor of being the first Marine unit to enter the city and to "combat launch" an AVLB. They were also forced to breach a second minefield on the west bank while under fire to gain a foothold for the Division. Eventually most of Blue Diamond and its supporting units would use this very bridge to enter the city.

3/4 Marines were still held up at the river a few kilometers further south, waiting for engineers to erect a pontoon bridge. Finally, after either killing or pushing back most of the defenders into redoubts on the northern bank, the Marine commander launched an "old-fashioned" infantry charge across the smaller damaged bridge with Kilo and Lima Companies of 3/4 Marines. Despite earlier artillery fire that destroyed an AAV and killed its crewmen, this assault crossing went almost unchallenged, and once across the river, they found themselves in a neighborhood composed of low-slung shops and two-storey houses. Marines fanned out and advance units set up sniper positions. Marines were jittery, fearing suicide attacks, and several approaching vehicles were riddled with bullets. In the aftermath it was found that a dozen Iraqis in vehicles had been killed, of whom ten were civilians fleeing the combat. There were, however, several other armed Saddam "faithful" among the dead. The depth of the bridgehead was 500m



Sheltering behind their IFAV, these Marines of BLT 2/2, 24th MEU, are on the alert for armed civilians. They are in the process of raiding the Ba'ath Party Headquarters in Qalat Sukar on 7 April. The lineup of weapons from front to back include an M16A2 5.56mm assault rifle, an M40A1 7.62mm sniper rifle, and an M240G 7.62mm machine-gun mounted on the IFAV. Stowed atop the packs on the left is a Javelin anti-tank missile. During OIF it was found that most sniper shots were taken at distances well under 300 meters, with the longest daytime shot attempted being 608 meters. The Marines possess one of the finest battlefield sniper capabilities in the world. (Cpl. Jeff Sisto, USMC)



These Marines of Echo Company, BLT 2/2 Marines, have removed their CPOG jackets, apparently finding it too hot to wear them under their Interceptor vests. They take aim along a side street during the same raid on the Ba'ath Party premises in Qalat Sukar. They are armed with M16A2 assault rifles, each of which weighs 4.05kg when loaded with a 30-round magazine. The two men on the right have M203 40mm grenade launchers attached under their M16A2 barrels. Two are also wearing goggles, a piece of equipment useful for shutting out the sun, dust and fragments caused by incoming fire. (Cpl. Jeff Sisto, USMC) as engineers began repairing the Baghdad Bridge. Alongside it a pontoon bridge was also being laid. To enter Baghdad, RCT-1 followed the route of RCT-7 over the northern crossing. Marine commanders had allotted a sector of eastern Baghdad to each of the RCTs, and they also knew that by now enemy opposition was uncoordinated at best. They made preparations for the final push to secure the city.

Tuesday 8 April

At three points, Marines were pouring across the Diyala River, including at the newly repaired Baghdad Bridge and neighboring pontoon bridge. The first four units across – 3/4, 1/7, 3/7 Marines and 1st Tanks – had met no organized resistance, and they sensed that the city was ripe for the picking. Moving methodically along Highway 6 with 1st Tanks leading, RCT-7 met stray shots but no dug-in defenders. 1st Tanks moved towards and began clearing Al Rashid Airbase, fighting and defeating heavily armed Iraqis with T-72 tanks, APCs, technicals and artillery, before eventually capturing it and using the site as a logistics operations center. Generally though, Iraqi troops were scattered and deployed erratically at the brigade level with poor coordination from above, most retreating in confusion. Speaking of Baghdad, one soldier said, "It must be on autopilot. No one is in charge. The inmates are running the asylum." A Marine unit came across a horrifying Ba'ath Party prison whose inmates were all children. Sons of parents who refused to support Saddam's regime were incarcerated there, some for as long as five years. Usually at the age of sixteen they would be drafted into the Iraqi Army as conscripts. These were the kind of unwilling troops that had faced the coalition onslaught in southern Iraq, and who naturally had no inclination to fight.

I MEF encountered minimal resistance from regular 10th and 14th Division army units near Al Amarah in the east of Iraq, a town of 330,000 mostly Shiites. These two Iraqi divisions had already abandoned their weapons and departed the battlefield after repeated air attacks. TF Tarawa occupied the 10th Armored Division HQ. This town is 48km from the Iranian border, and though Marines expected stiff resistance, they only met jubilant residents.

Echo Company Marines dismount from their MTVR truck that is armed with a Mk.19 40mm automatic grenade launcher. They are in Qalat Sukar on 7 April. The wooden seats in the cargo area face inwards - which is not good if the truck's occupants were to be fired upon while seated this way. MOUT had caused initial consternation for the Marines in An Nasiriyah and the Army in An Najaf, but this state did not last long. (SSgt. Bryan P. Reed, USMC)

These are members of 2/6 Marines of TF Yankee on 7 April. They run across the sandy desert surface of Iraq before commencing a patrol near LSA (Logistics Support Area) Viper. TF Yankee was continually conducting aggressive patrols in its assigned territory to ensure that supply routes and logistic operations remained secure. They wear Interceptor "flak jackets", a type of IBA (Individual Body Armor). There were numerous instances of bullet impacts that could have been fatal but for the SAPI (Small Arms Protective Insert) plates that were inserted inside the IBA. A study of the opening attack in Iraq showed that only nine percent of the combat wounds to 118 Army fatalities were in the torso, and these were either by larger caliber weapons or shots that came in at odd angles and got around the IBA (for example, via an armpit.). This demonstrated the value of IBA. (Sgt. Mauricio Campino, USMC)

Two "Devil Dogs" from Echo Co, 2/2, 24th MEU sprint to a sandbagged position in Qalat Sukar on 7 April. This position had been abandoned by Iraqi troops near the Ba'ath party building. The two running Marines carry SMAWs (Shoulder-launched Multi-purpose Assault Weapons). This weapon is exclusive to the USMC and is based on the Israeli B-300. The launcher weighs 7.54kg and is 76cm long, but when the rocket is inserted, the length extends to 1.37 meters. While the SMAW can be fired at a tank at a range of up to 500 meters, it is intended for much shorter ranges. (SSgt. Bryan P. Reed, USMC)

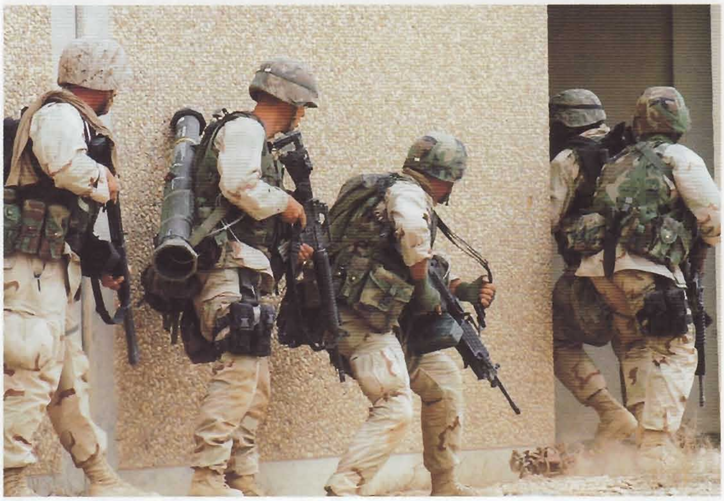
Again in Qalat Sukar, these 7-ton trucks wait for their 2/2 Marines passengers to return from a mission in the town. The MTVR on the right has a 40mm Mk.19 automatic grenade launcher fitted in the truck's weapons ring. The standard rate of fire for this weapon is about 40 grenade rounds per minute, and the practical maximum range is 1.5km (SSgt. Bryan P. Reed, USMC)

Wednesday 9 April

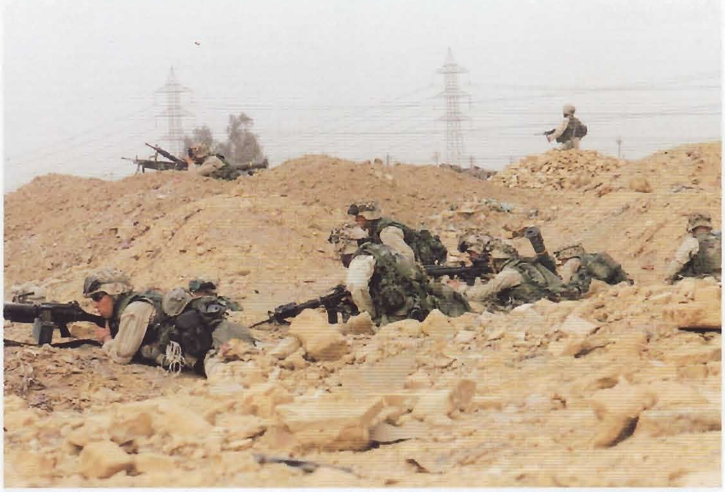
Most of the 1st MarDiv was now moving through east Baghdad. RCT-7 was advancing from the southeast, RCT-1 from the east, and RCT-5 from the northeast, after being the last unit to cross the Highway 6 Diyala bridge. In the early morning, Marines in the southeast awoke ready to attack block-by-block and house-by-house through the city streets of Baghdad. Before dawn they pushed into urban neighborhoods but surprisingly found no resistance. Instead of surrendering en masse or fighting, regular troops simply melted away without trace, leaving irregulars and *fedayeen* to offer mostly feeble resistance. RCT-5 proceeded to move north to an assembly area along Highway 2 prior to entering urban Baghdad. 2/5 and 3/5 Marines attacked Khansa and Al-Azamiya districts, which allowed them to seal the ring around Baghdad, preventing anyone from getting in or out of Baghdad.

By noon, RCT-7 forces in south Baghdad had swiftly covered all of the allotted territory planned for that day's operations. At 2:00p.m., 1/7 Marines started rolling southwest into the peninsular formed by the Tigris that contained up-market Embassy Row (Al Karradah) where embassies, presidential palaces and Baghdad University are located. 1/7 Marines came under fire from Baghdad University and it turned into a battlefield as Marines stormed the campus, going door-to-door to ferret out fighters. Physical contact was made with 3rd ID troops across the Tigris.

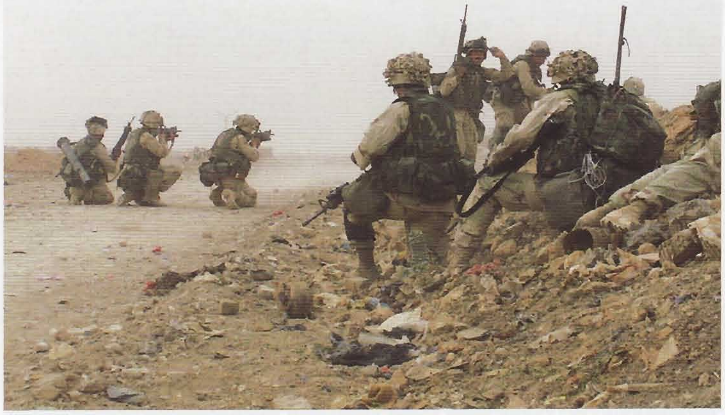
In Firdos Square in the late afternoon a small Iraqi crowd had gathered to try and topple a six-meter tall statue of Saddam Hussein. A U.S. Marine Corporal, a tank mechanic with Bravo Company, 1st Tanks, clambered up the boom of an M88A2 Hercules and placed a U.S. flag over the statue's head. However, this was quickly replaced by an Iraqi flag. Marines tied chains and a thick rope around the statue and pulled it down with the M88A2, to the joy of Iraqi onlookers. It was not all euphoria in the capital though, and as one Baghdad resident said of the U.S. liberators, "We want them to finish Saddam Hussein and we want them to leave." There were few triumphant scenes like that of Firdos Square, with residents instead warily and suspiciously eyeing their liberators. The regime of Saddam essentially ceased to exist on this day. Meanwhile the 1st UK Armoured Division continued its move north to link up with Marines near Al Amarah.



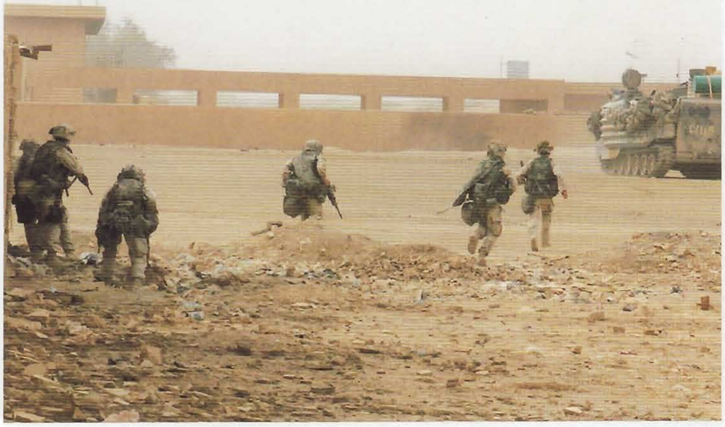
In a raid on a military compound on 8 April, "Grunts" burst into a building to clear it of any defenders. The squad is from Fox Co, 2/6 Marines. The Marine third from the left is armed with an M249 SAW, while the one immediately behind him has an AT-4 slung over his shoulder. The 6.7kg AT-4 is a single-shot, disposable version of the Swedish 84mm "Karl Gustav" anti-tank weapon. Effective range for the AT-4 is 300 meters, with the shaped-charge able to penetrate 400mm of armor. However, the AT-4 produces a nasty back-blast. On the premises, Marines found a deserted enemy position containing RPGs. (Sgt. Joseph R. Chenelly, USMC)



Another photo from the same engagement. Charlie Company, 1/5 Marines members have taken up better positions to engage Iraqi defenders. The one on the far left has set up his M249 SAW and is ready to lay down suppressive fire. By now the MOPP gear has been removed, but they all wear IBA with SAPI plates. These definitely saved lives, including those of armored vehicle crews, and one Marine lauded, "SAPI is God's gift to the Marine Corps." (Sgt. Kevin R. Reed, USMC)



This photo was snapped during a firefight on 8 April as Charlie Company of 1/5 Marines was poised around the exposed jugular of Baghdad. One of the Marines has a man-portable SINCGARS radio in his backpack, while a number have camouflaged scrim attached to their helmet covers. Two communications systems universally praised by Marines were the BFT (Blue Force Tracker) and iridium satellite phones. The latter were reliable at nearly all times under most conditions since they did not rely on line of sight. (Sgt. Kevin R. Reed, USMC)



An AAV and dismounted infantry carry out a coordinated attack on a suspected enemy position. The unit is Charlie Company, 1/5 Marines, and the date is 8 April. In such attacks the infantry dismounted, while the weapons of their Amtracs provided supporting fire. One of the greatest threats to AAV crews and embarked troops is an RPG or similar anti-tank weapon. To help counter this, each vehicle is fitted with a fire-suppression system composed of infrared sensors that, in the blink of an eye, detect both the heat and light from a HEAT (High Explosive Anti-Tank) round explosion and quickly discharge bottles of Halon gas. (Sgt. Kevin R. Reed, USMC)

A squad from Charlie Company, 1/5 Marines, exits the cavernous hull of their AAV through the hydraulically-operated rear ramp on 8 April. This huge 7.9-meter long workhorse of a vehicle requires a crew of three and can comfortably carry ten to fifteen passengers. Officially the capacity is twenty-five combat-equipped passengers. (Sgt. Kevin R. Reed, USMC)

This LAV-25 passes by a burning pickup truck on a rural Iraqi road. Fedayeen used such vehicles fitted with machine guns or other heavier weapons mounted in the cargo bay. The turret of the LAV-25 is fitted with an M242 25mm Bushmaster cannon (with 210 ready rounds) and an M240 7.62mm coaxial machine gun (with 200 ready rounds and 800 rounds stowed), and eight smoke grenade launchers (with eight rounds ready and eight stowed). (Courtesy of Brandon Wright, USMC)

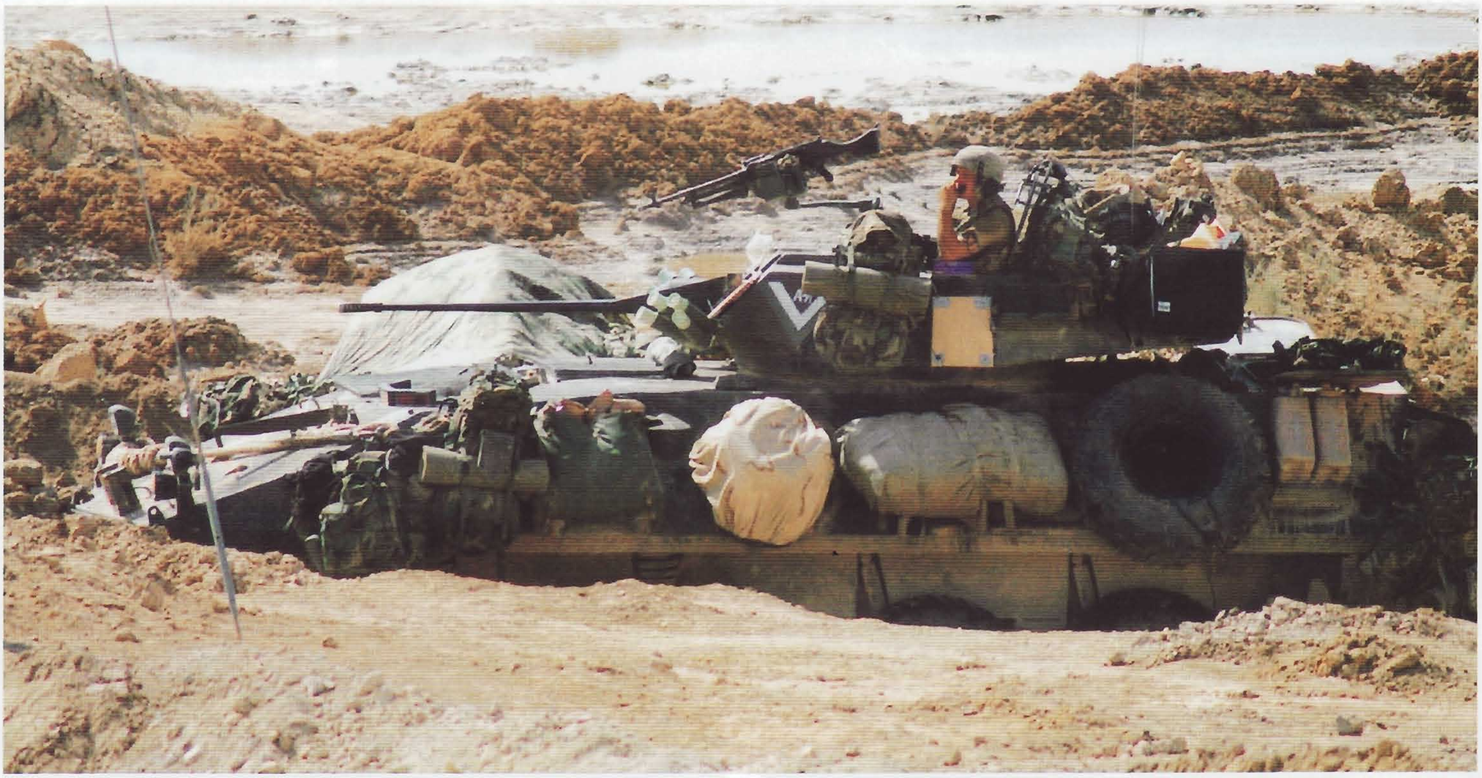
This crossing point over the Diyala River near Baghdad was constructed by Army engineers of 459th Engineering Company, a West Virginia reserve unit. This photo was taken on 9 April as LAV-25s of Delta Company, 1st LAR Battalion, cross over the ribbon bridge. The LAVs are swathed in crew gear and equipment, including CIPs. In most cases the Iraqi Army failed to take tactical advantage of manmade and natural water barriers. They either improperly defended them or failed to destroy crossing sites to prevent their use by Coalition forces. (LCpl. Andrew P. Roufs, USMC)

Thursday 10 April

One of the fiercest actions for Marines in the entire conflict took place this day. A tip-off had been received that the ex-president had been spotted at the seventeen-acre Al-Azimiyah Presidential Palace, an ornate two-story palace situated on the eastern bank of the Tigris north of the city center. A column of 1/5 Marines teamed up with a platoon of Special Forces for a night attack. The entire battalion, led by Alpha Company, had been ordered to strike from the northeast to take the palace. A convoy of seventy vehicles, consisting of M1 Abrams, AAVs and Humvees, roared along Highway 2 at 40km/h through Sadr City, with Cobra helicopters overhead. At 4:15 a.m. they were greeted by a tidal wave of bullets, tracers, grenades and rockets that raked the convoy in what came to be known as "RPG Alley". They faced determined and vicious resistance from paramilitaries who lurked in shadowy side streets and building entrances, pouring great volumes of fire onto the convoy. In about an hour, more than forty casualties had been suffered. Marines returned fire from within their armored vehicles, all the while calling up planes to strafe and drop bombs.

The danger was heightened when the convoy's leading tank platoon from Alpha Company took a wrong turn at one of the city's large roundabouts, doubling back and leading half of the convoy astray. As the lost convoy approached a bridge, they were again raked by weapons fire at an ambush site. As the convoy moved over the bridge, irregulars appeared from underneath its pylons and peppered the vehicles with bullets. Special Forces saved the day as they jumped from their SUVs and tossed grenades onto the militiamen below.

The convoy was now stretched thin and lost, with enemy fire continuing unabated. Bravo Company found an alternative route to the palace, while Alpha Company, too, finally forged its own path in the right direction. At a roundabout near the palace, the convoy was again met by a maelstrom of fire. Iraqi forces fired relentlessly from rooftops, alleyways, and balconies, raining down bullets, grenades and RPGs. Some of the Iraqis were dressed in green army uniforms, others in black *fedayeen* uniforms, and others in civilian attire. Ferocious fighting between Iraqi forces and Marines

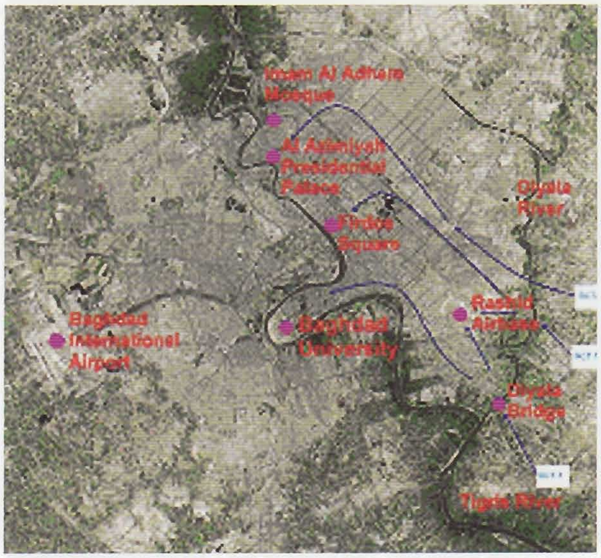


This LAV-25 provides security at a pontoon bridge constructed over the Euphrates River on 6 April in the vicinity of An Nasiriyah. The commander watches from the turret, with an M240G machine gun at the ready in front of his hatch. This bridge has been recently used by I MEF's Command Element as they relocated their field operations center north into central Iraq. (Sgt. Joseph R. Chenelly, USMC)

continued for the next hour as the convoy passed through this ambush site to reach the relative calm of the palace compound. The wounded were taken to a collection point at the back of the palace where the more seriously could be evacuated by helicopter. Even then, enemy combatants were firing on the rescue helicopters. In this vicious encounter between the hours of 4:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m., a total of 76 Marines were wounded (one-third of them critically), and one killed. It had been a disastrous ambush and one embedded reporter bluntly stated later that evening, "Tonight has been the worst night of the war for U.S. Marines."

ديوانية
Diwaniya

On a highway on the outskirts of Ad Diwaniyah, a group of Humvees prepares for a foray into the city on 9 April. The pictured Humvees have rear-mounted "gypsy" racks designed to hold fuel and water cans. To promote a water conservation mindset among the Marines and Sailors within the 1st MarDiv, one small funnel was included on the packing list for every four persons deployed to OIF. The funnel was used to prevent spillage while filling canteens and "Camelbaks" from five-gallon jugs or 400-gallon "Water Buffalos" (water trailers). This unit is from 2nd Force Reconnaissance Battalion, TF Tarawa. (LCpl. Shawn C. Rhodes, USMC)



Satellite map of Baghdad (Courtesy of Digital Globe)

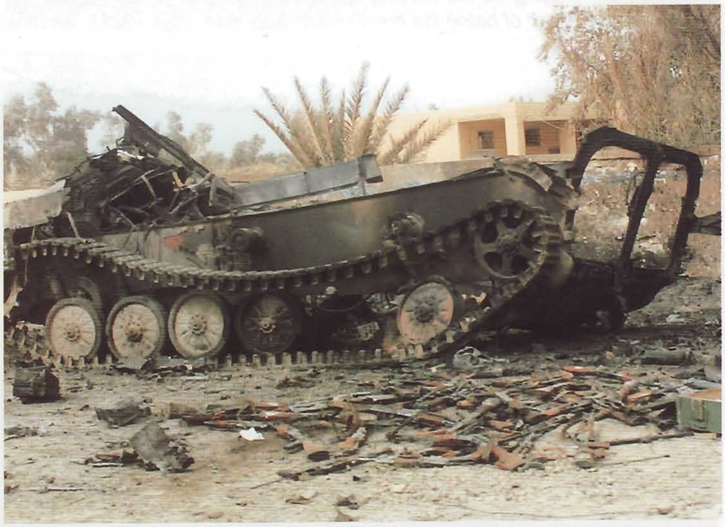
A Fire Team from an infantry rifle squad of Charlie Company, 1/5 Marines, secures occupants of a truck that had previously opened fire on them. This unit of RCT-5 is just 25km northeast of Baghdad on 9 April, though Marines had already entered the city by this time. The man on the left has an M16A2 with an M203 grenade launcher fitted. (Sgt. Kevin R. Reed, USMC)

However, there was to be no respite as Alpha Company was ordered to immediately proceed to the Imam Abu Hanifah Mosque, less than 1km away, where there had been another reported sighting of Saddam Hussein. Enemy contact was heavy as the convoy made its way there, and as it swept around the northeast corner of the mosque complex, they faced a barrage of automatic gunfire from gunmen in nearby buildings and the portals of the mosque itself. At a critical time an A-10 Warthog strafed the building, allowing the Marines to make a breach into the mosque's inner courtyard. By noon the mosque was secured, and forty EPWs taken. Reports varied, but around 200 Iraqi fighters were killed in the storming of this mosque.

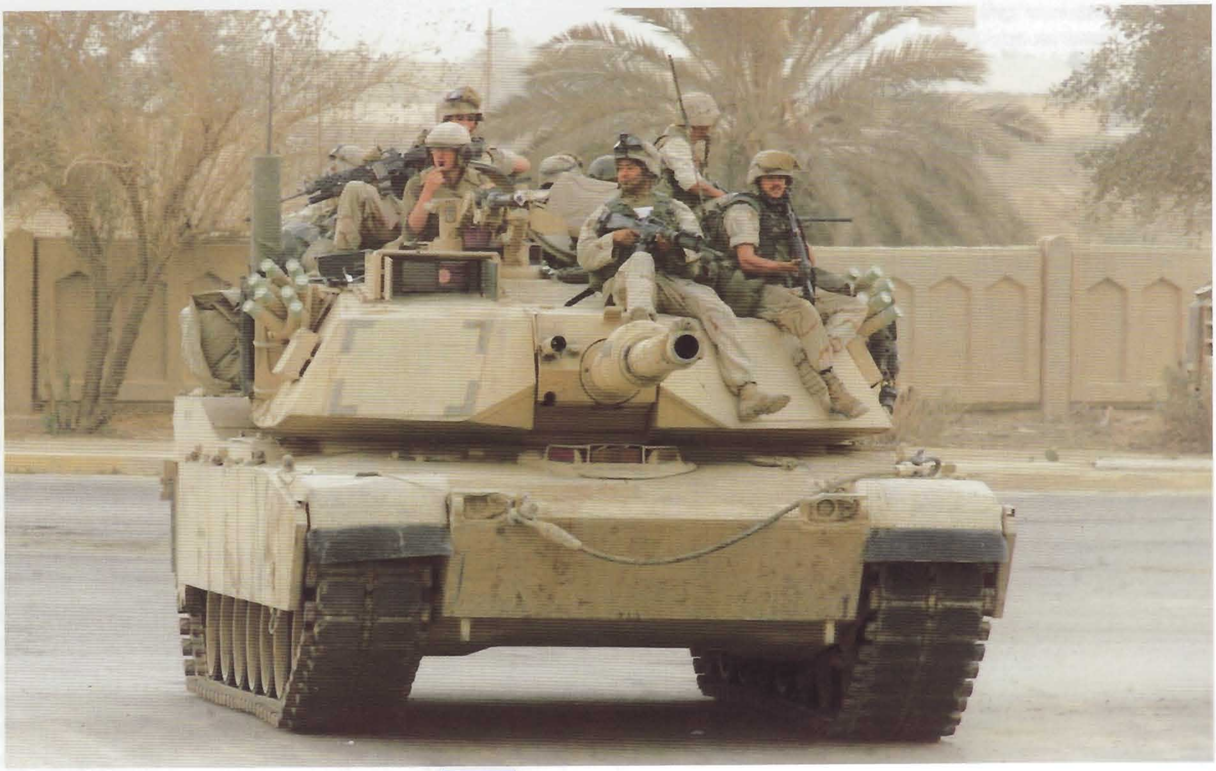
Saddam Hussein had ruled Iraq with an iron fist of discipline for 24 years, and 24 hours after the collapse of his dictatorship, all semblance of order evaporated around Baghdad. Bands of looters ran amok, ransacking a host of locations such as government ministry buildings, and the opulent mansions of Uday and Qusay Hussein on Sadeh Street. Marines were tightening their grip on the eastern sector of the capital, but northern riverside suburbs like Atifaya and Kadhimaya, and western areas like Al Mansur, were still infested with paramilitaries loyal to Saddam and the Ba'ath Party.

It was clearly obvious that there were not enough troops in Baghdad, for there were less than two divisions covering the whole city. If the 4th ID moving down from Turkey had been present, it could have made a partial difference. A suicide bomb attack at a checkpoint less than a mile from Firdos Square left four Marines seriously injured. In northwest Baghdad, a Marine was killed and twenty-two injured in a firefight outside the 8th century Imam al-Adham Mosque. A number of Iraqis were either killed or captured in this engagement, and weapons and explosives were seized. Overall about one-third of Iraq territory still lay outside American and British control. Looting and revenge killings were rampant, and there was a widespread state of anarchy and violence. In the north, U.S.-backed Kurdish *pesh merga* forces moved forward to occupy Kirkuk, after several weeks of cautious maneuvers.

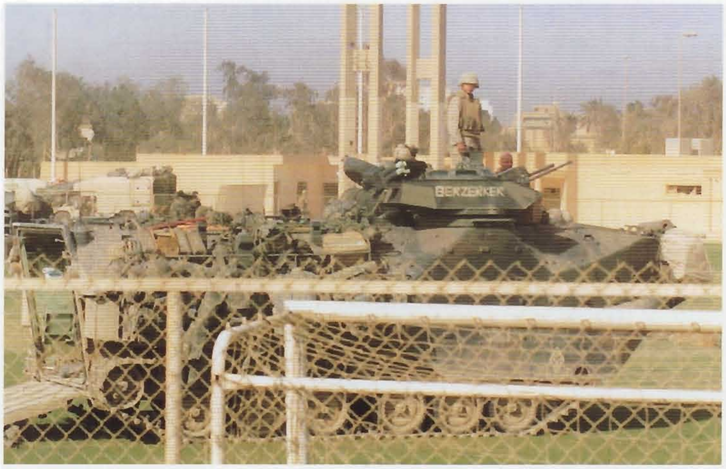
A shot taken at one of Saddam Hussein's presidential palaces in Baghdad on 9 April. These are members of Charlie Company, 1/7 Marines. Some Marines felt that the M16A2 rifle was too unwieldy and long for urban fighting. They also felt that a carbine would be better suited when dismounting a vehicle. Especially for crewmen of LAVs, AAVs, tanks and motor transport units, there was a call after the fight for the more compact M4 carbine version of the service rifle to be adopted. (LCpl Kevin C Quihuis Jr, USMC)



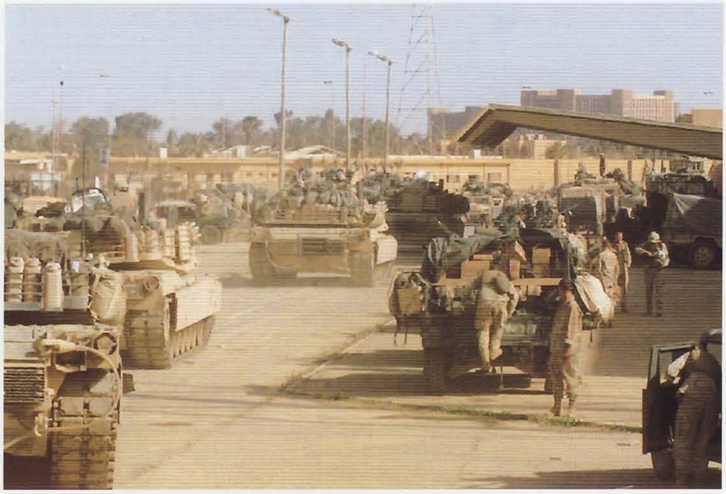
A BMP-2 sits wrecked at the roadside, photographed on 9 April. A standard BMP-2 has three crewmembers – in the turret on the left is the gunner with the commander on the right, plus a driver at the front left of the hull. It can carry 7 infantrymen. (LCpl. Andreas A. Plaza, USMC)



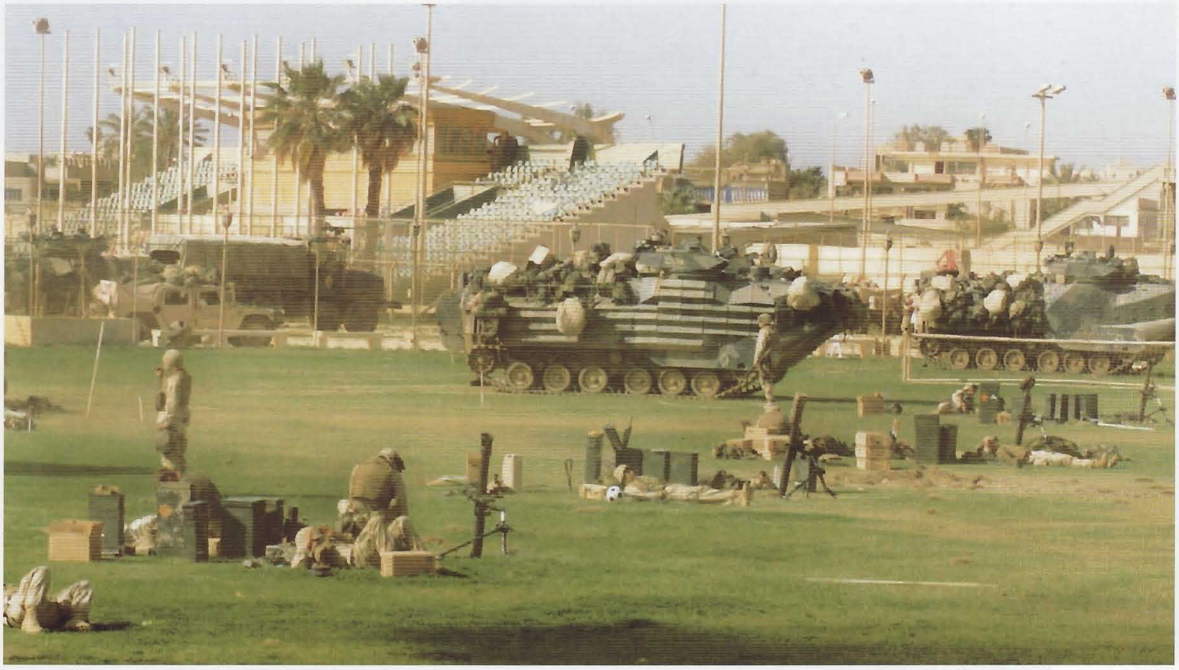
This M1A1 gives a lift to members of 3/7 Marines after securing a military storage facility in the capital. The date is 9 April, and the CIPs that give a distinct thermal image are evident on the turret front. A tow cable is draped around the front of the hull instead of on the turret, while the second cable would be stowed on the rear. This means that in a recovery operation, one tank could back up or pull up to another tank and two tow cables were already pre-rigged to effect quick recovery. (Sgt. Paul L. Anstine II, USMC)



This AAV named "Berzerker" is parked at the Olympic Stadium in Baghdad on 10 April. AAVs are constructed of welded aluminum alloy, and are 3.27 meters wide and 3.31 meters high overall. Charlie Company, 1st Tank Battalion, are staging before moving out to secure parts of the capital. 1st Tanks had the honor of being the first to enter Baghdad. (Sgt. Paul L. Anstine II, USMC)



Baghdad's Olympic Soccer Stadium is feverish with activity as M1A1s depart their assembly area on 10 April. The BREs are filled with plastic five-gallon fuel, oil and water cans to extend the range of the tanks. Each Abrams has CIPs fitted, all of which were applied in Kuwait prior to crossing the LD (Line of Departure) into Iraq. (Sgt. Paul L. Anstine II, USMC)



A view of 3/7 Marines at the Olympic Soccer Stadium in the capital on 10 April. Because of the amount of AAVs employed from both stateside and MPS, not all "Amtracs" had EAAK fitted, though its bolt attachment points are visible. Set up on the football field is a battery of M252 81mm Medium Extended Range Mortars with rounds of ammunition on hand ready for fire missions. The M252 mortar's sustained rate of fire is sixteen rounds per minute. (Sgt. Paul L. Anstine II, USMC)

Friday 11 April

Despite a night of continual harassment, RCT-5 now located in the heart of Baghdad, sent out patrols into northwest Baghdad. Coalition forces had, by now, effectively quelled organized resistance in Baghdad. Some *fedayeen* continued to prowl around Baghdad, but there were cases where angry civilians chased them off. There were also instances of ordinary citizens reaching out to American soldiers, leading one Marine sergeant on patrol to comment, "These people couldn't be friendlier." Marines remarked that at that time the populace was generally friendly, some showing them where hidden arms caches were located, or pointing out Ba'athists to be apprehended, but this probably depended on which district soldiers found themselves in. However, their presence was nowhere near adequate for lessening the wave of looting that was surging throughout Baghdad. Marines discovered 310 suicide bomber vests in a Baghdad suicide bomb factory, 160 of which were engineered with explosives and ball bearings. Another bomb factory found by Marines involved explosives stuffed into children's dolls.

Events were compounded by the fact that soldiers still faced combat conditions in many areas, a state of affairs that fully occupied the troops' attention. The shortage of men on the ground was certainly a logical result of the insistence on using a light invasion force, plus a consequence of the Iraqi regime's faster than expected collapse. The lack of effective security certainly did great harm to the image of the American liberation. It was announced that dusk-to-dawn curfews would be enforced in certain parts of the capital. Commander of 3/7 Marines, Lt. Col. Michael Belcher, announced, "Priorities are as follows: protect key structures, such as the power system; safeguard humanitarian sites like hospitals and aid distribution centers; protect commercial buildings." Marines continued to link up with the UK 1st Armoured Division between Basra and Al Amarah.

It was suspected that up to one brigade of the Adnan Republican Guard Division, along with Special Republican Guard units, might be digging in around Tikrit, so TF Tripoli, was sent north in an initial effort to isolate the city. This 3,000-man Marine task force was a special purpose mechanized unit formed around 1st, 2nd, and 3rd LAR battalions, Golf Company of 2/23 Marines, 5/11 Marines (artillery), SEAL Team 3, engineers and a combat support element. Tikrit was thought to be a viper's nest of Ba'athist opposition, being as it was the birthplace of Saddam Hussein. TF Tripoli was followed north by 2/5 and 3/5 Marines, who advanced as far as Samarra. Further north, Kurdish *pesh merga*, U.S Special Operations and 173rd Airborne Brigade troops moved into the northern city of Mosul after it was hastily abandoned by Iraqi troops. Mosul is the third largest city in Iraq, home to more than two million people. The 26th MEU was

This is a refueling site near the Olympic Soccer Stadium on the same day. Rolled up green foam ground sleeping mats have been placed around the antenna bases, a common practice. A plastic chair has also found its way into the collection of stowage on the turret of the nearest Abrams. USMC tanks all have a rectangular mounting bracket around the rear exhaust outlet to allow an extended exhaust outlet elbow to be fitted for wading purposes. (Sgt. Paul L. Anstine II, USMC)

ordered to begin moving its forces into the city on 11 April to help secure it, no easy task due to the city's various tribal and ethnic factions.

Saturday 12 April

Operations to secure and stabilize cities and thoroughfares continued, and on this day the 101st Airborne Division began arriving. Their entry would allow both I MEF and V Corps to increase their presence elsewhere around the country. Further south, the city of Al Kut was finally completely cleared by TF Tarawa.

Sunday 13 April

TF Tripoli's 300 lightly armored vehicles moved 144km overnight before their force converged on Tikrit in the afternoon, backed up by an intense bombardment from jets and helicopter gunships. 2nd LAR took up a blocking position to the north after bypassing Tikrit to the west, while 1st LAR pushed up from the south. American commanders estimated there were 2,500 Iraqi loyalists holed up in the city. Battles in Tikrit lasted into the night, but then the fierce resistance inexplicably dissipated, with Americans moving forward to find only empty streets. "We're not sure where they all went," lamented one Marine major. The last remnants of organized resistance by cohesive Iraqi units were fading, and by now the regime had lost control over every major town in the country. Previously Marines had discovered five camouflaged aircraft near Tikrit, probably concealed there to help Iraqi leaders escape. In a blocking position guarding TF Tripoli's rear, Delta Company of 3rd LAR Battalion approached a small village near Samarra. An Iraqi police officer tipped them off to the presence of seven American prisoners in a village house. After a search they were found - five Americans from the 507th Maintenance Company that had been captured in An Nasiriyah, along with two downed Apache helicopter pilots. Marines quickly whisked them out on helicopters to end their frightening odyssey.

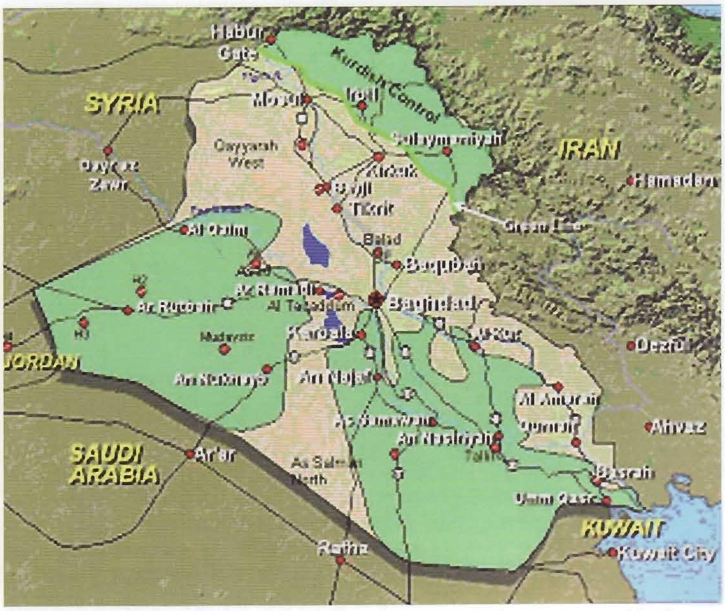
Looting and chaos continued unabated in Baghdad, and after a few days of seeming inaction, American troops began to quell the disorder with joint Iraqi-American patrols. In a press conference General Franks declared the Iraqi Army had been "destroyed" and that "there is no regime command and control". This did not negate the fact that dangerous pockets of paramilitaries, criminals and foreign fighters remained throughout Iraq.

Monday 14 April

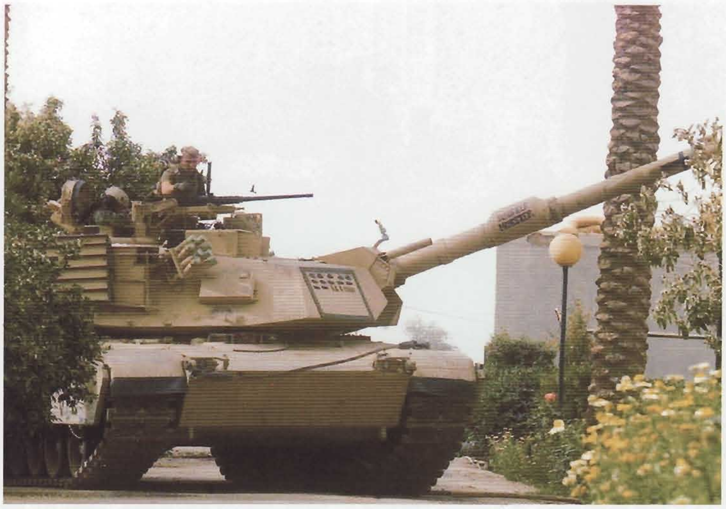
As the day wore on in Tikrit, more and more residents slipped past Marines guarding Saddam's grand sprawling palace, looting anything that could be removed from the lavish site.Searches for regime supporters continued in Tikrit.

While their section leader consults his map, these Marines of Charlie Company, 1/5 Marines, cautiously advance in a suburb of northern Baghdad. (Sgt. Kevin R. Reed, USMC)

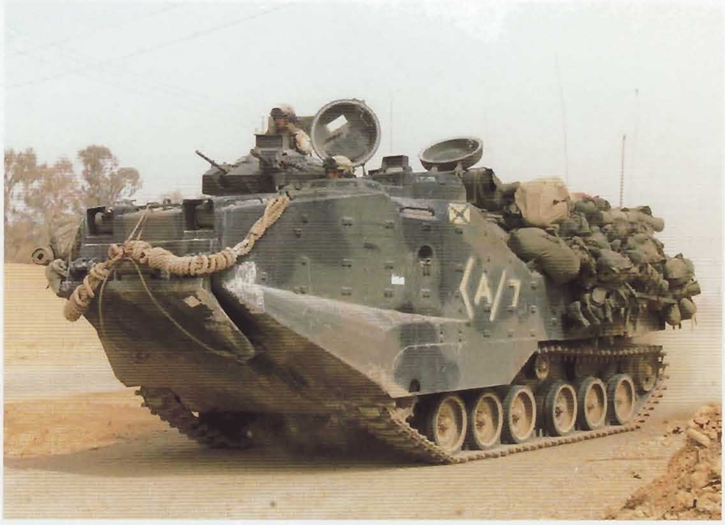
1/5 Marines was given the dangerous task of penetrating central Baghdad from the northeast to occupy Al Azimiyah Presidential Palace on 10 April. These members of Charlie Company work to clear Baghdad streets of Iraqi resistance. The machine gunner aims his M240G, a weapon that was praised for its performance. These Marines are wearing MOLLE (MOdular Lightweight Load-bearing Equipment) gear. (Sgt. Kevin R. Reed, USMC)



Territory occupied as at 13 April 2003. (Source: U.S. Department of Defense)

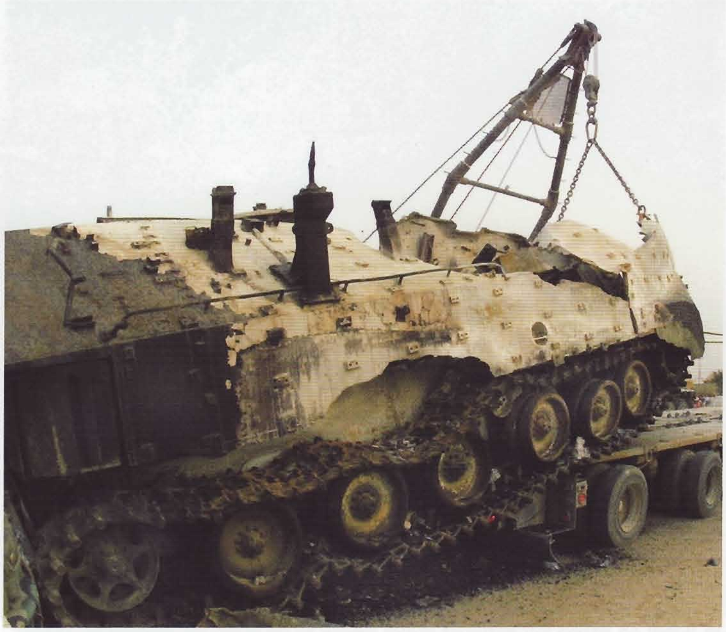


C-21 (pronounced Charlie two one), the "Sinister Minister", patrols the mean streets of Baghdad on 10 April. According to the tally markings on the CIP, this M1A1 has had a successful campaign with five Iraqi tanks and seven APCs destroyed! MPAT (Multi-Purpose Anti-Tank) became the preferred main gun round during the fight. This ammo proved effective against any type of target that was encountered. (LCpl Kevin C Quihuis Jr, USMC)



On 11 April this AAV of Charlie Company, 1/7 Marines, makes its presence felt on the streets of a Baghdad suburb. This vehicle does not carry an EAAK, leaving it more vulnerable to heavy machine gun fire or RPG attacks. The AAV7A1 has a combat weight of 22,838kg before the EAAK is added. (LCpl Kevin C Quihuis Jr, USMC)

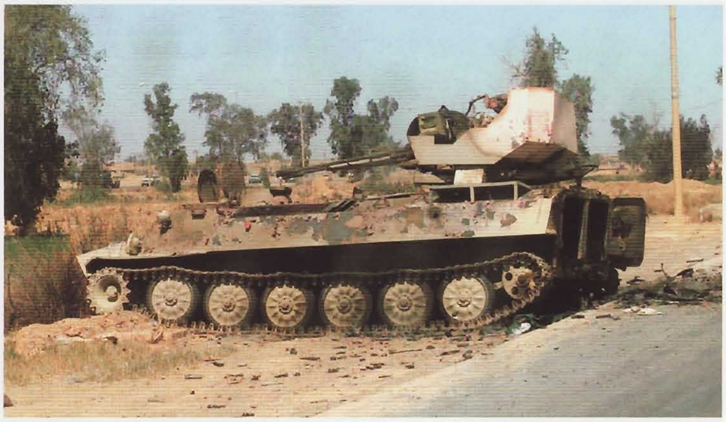
The name "Kuler Blynd" has been painted on the main gun bore evacuator, and "Lazy Eye" on the coaxial MG smoke tube of this Abrams from 2nd Platoon, Bravo Company, 1st Tank Battalion. It is parked to provide security at a checkpoint in front of a mosque. The tank commander remains watchful at this post in the streets of central Baghdad on 11 April. (Sgt. Joseph R. Chenelly, USMC)



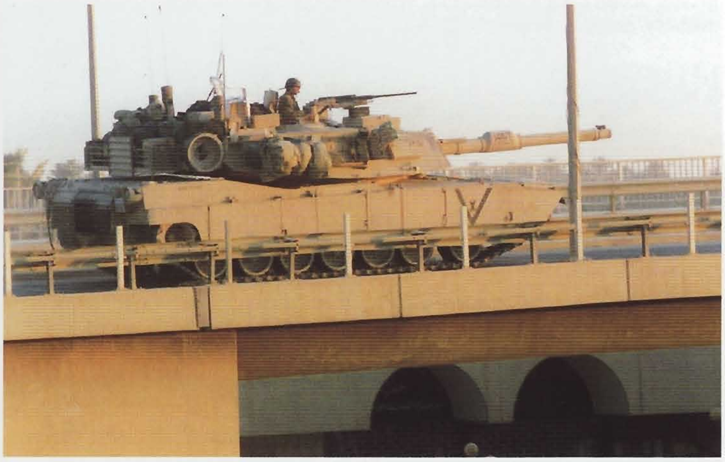
This AAV without an EAAK was destroyed by Iraqi defenders, and is now being recovered by CSSB-18 onto an M1070 HET (Heavy Equipment Tractor). The boom of an M88 VTR helps to drag the twisted hulk of the AAV onto an M1000 trailer. The HET utilizes a Detroit diesel V8 engine that develops 500bhp at just 1,200rpm, hinting at the tremendous torque available through the 8-wheel drive. This photo was taken on 11 April. After OIF 1, Marine leaders were requesting four HETs to be supplied to each battalion for a heavy hauling capability. (MSgt. Edward D. Kniery, USMC)

Looting in Baghdad seemed to abate a little, and street stalls started selling eggs, fruit and vegetables on the streets. It was an eerie moment between chaos and calm, with Iraqi sentiments just as unsettled as the situation on the streets. American commanders were beginning to realize that to ensure stability they would have to rely on some of the same Iraqi forces they had come to overthrow. Marines were being required to shift from combat operations to civil-military operations, a major transition. On this day the Pentagon declared that major operations in Iraq were over. General Peter Pace, Vice-Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staffs, called it, "A catastrophic success." To date 118 Americans had lost their lives. A Pentagon spokeswoman announced, "The regime is at its end and its leaders are either dead, surrendered, or on the run."

An alternative view of the same Abrams and AAV as they man a checkpoint on a Baghdad street. This scene is Firdos Square. Two days earlier at this location, Marines of Bravo Company, 1st Tanks, utilizing the winch of an M88A2, toppled a statue of Saddam Hussein at the request of local Iraqis. The TV images of this event that were seen round the world became a symbol of the regime's downfall. The large cylindrical pedestal that once supported a statue of Saddam Hussein can be seen in the background on the far right. (Sgt. Joseph R. Chenelly, USMC)

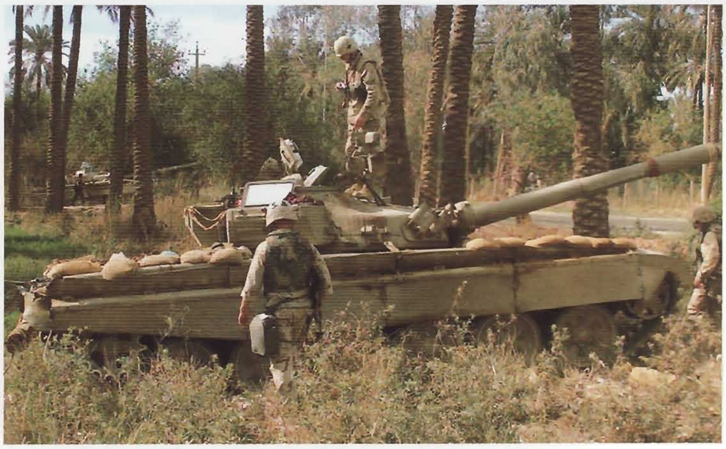


This is the burned out carcass of an MT-LB that was fitted with a ZU-23 anti-aircraft gun. It was photographed in Baghdad on 11 April. The combat weight for a standard MT-LB is 11,900kg. The ZU-23-2 has a maximum vertical range of 2,500 meters, though of course it can be used just as effectively against ground troops and lightly armored vehicles. Its sustainable rate of fire is 200 rounds per minute. (LCpl. Jennifer Krusen, USMC)

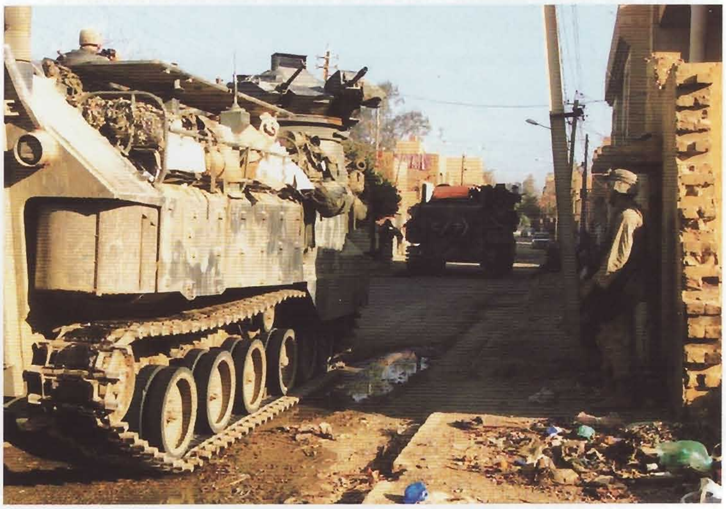


C-42, "Lost Souls", the XO's tank of Charlie Company, 1st Tank Battalion, rolls along an overpass on Highway 6 as it proceeds to an assembly area on 12 April. Urban fighting developed at several points during the course of OIF. In some parts of Baghdad, armor could move swiftly through the wide streets and broad avenues without as much infantry support as is normally needed. These roads offered long fields of fire and units could bypass congested, densely populated neighborhoods. Baghdad was penetrated along several routes, striking deep, seizing key features and symbols of power. This put Coalition forces behind the enemy, thereby demoralizing him and his will to fight. (Sgt. Paul L. Anstine II, USMC)

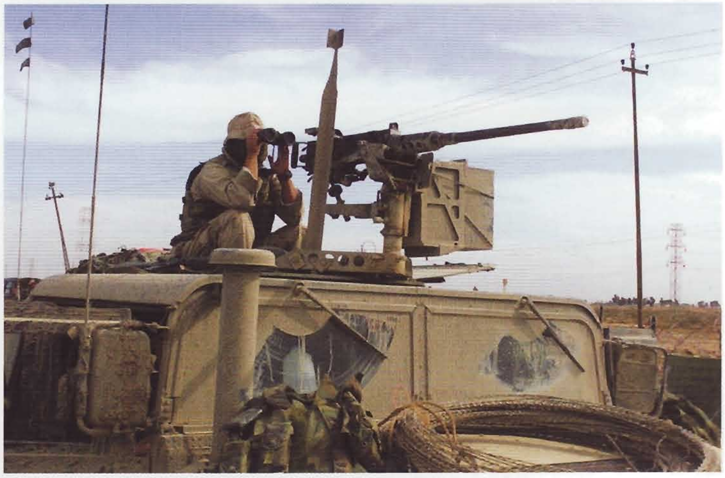
Marines armed with M16A2s pause along a fence line after a firefight with paramilitary forces near the Palestine Hotel in downtown Baghdad. Some Marines in OIF were carrying as many as fifteen rifle magazines on their person. This mixed group incorporating Marines from 3rd CAG (Civil Affairs Group), 3/4 Marines and 1st CEB, are awaiting further orders on 12 April. (Sgt. L. A. Salinas, USMC)



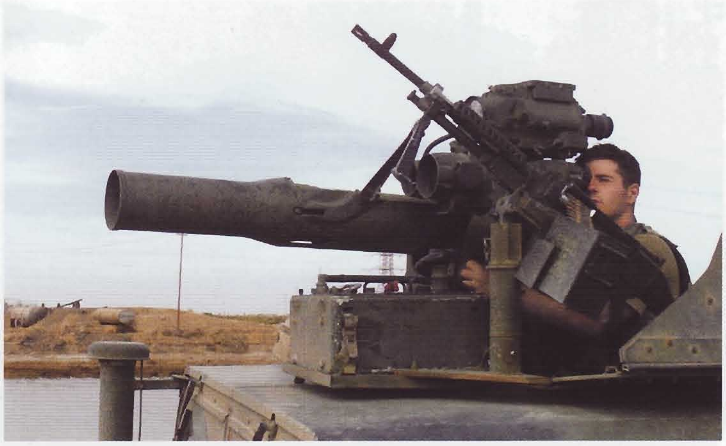
Curious Marines examine a pair of T-72 tanks left abandoned on the side of a road. They were parked in a palm grove to avoid detection and destruction from the air. T-72 tanks carry a 125mm main gun and have a road speed of 60km/h. At the start of the war it was estimated Iraq could have up to 700 of these available. It was considered to be the Iraqi Army's premier MBT (Main Battle Tank). (USMC)



With its turret oriented to the 4 o'clock position, this AAV of 2nd AAB supports dismounted members of Charlie Company, 1/7 Marines. They are clearing, or "policing up", a narrow Baghdad street on 12 April. (LCpl. Kevin C Quihuis Jr, USMC)

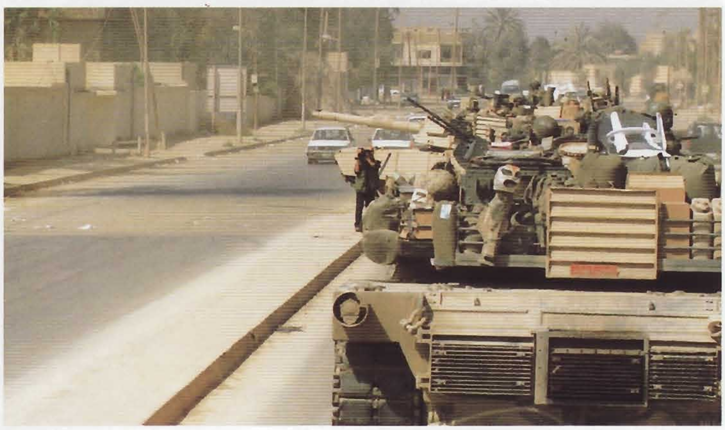


Modelers will want to take note of the heavy weathering on the windscreen of this Humvee mounting a .50-cal M2 HB machine gun. This heavy machine gun is popular with troops and is extremely reliable even in the harsh environment of Iraq. On occasion, sand got into the pintle pivoting area, causing the machine gun to stick in one position, so regular crew maintenance was needed to keep it moving freely. A Lance Corporal scans Iraqi civilians at a vehicle checkpoint through his binoculars on 12 April. This machine gunner is from the CAAT of Weapons Company, 2/2 Marines, 24th MEU. Mounted on the roof is a steel wire-cutting post. (SSgt. Bryan P. Reed, USMC)



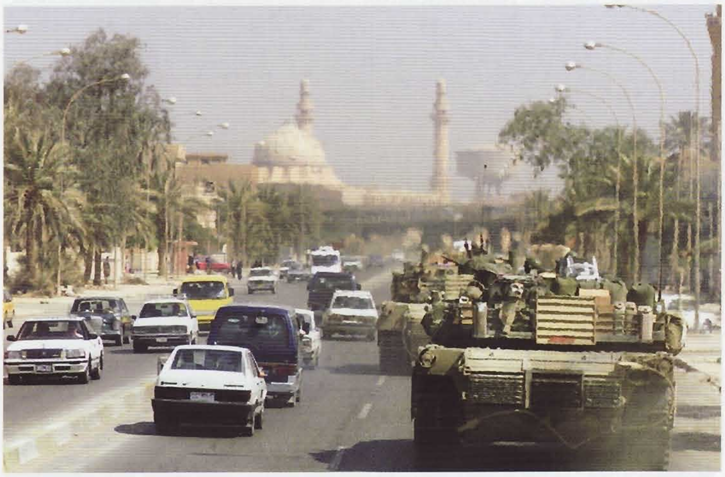
At the same checkpoint a machine gunner from 2/2 Marines monitors crowd activity. He is utilizing the optical sights of a TOW missile launcher mounted on his M1046 HMMWV for surveillance purposes. Operators of both TOW 2A and 2B (the difference is that the 2A has a tandem warhead for direct attacks, while the 2B fires a pair of projectiles from a top-attack flight as it flies over the target) were reportedly extremely happy with the performance of these anti-tank weapons. There were several reported catastrophic T-72 tank kills with TOWs. (SSgt. Bryan P. Reed, USMC)

American forces did their best to avoid destroying important civilian and infrastructure facilities, wanting to preserve them for the benefit of the country's reconstruction. Marines from MWSS-371 patrol around an electricity substation while a team of engineers attempts to restore electricity in the town of Ar Rifa on 13 April. One of them is armed with a 5.56mm M249 SAW (Squad Automatic Weapon) fitted with a 200-round plastic box magazine. The machine gun can also accept standard 30-round M16 magazines if need be, but these do not provide reliable feeding and tend to cause stoppages. (LCpl. J. P. Sotelo, USMC)

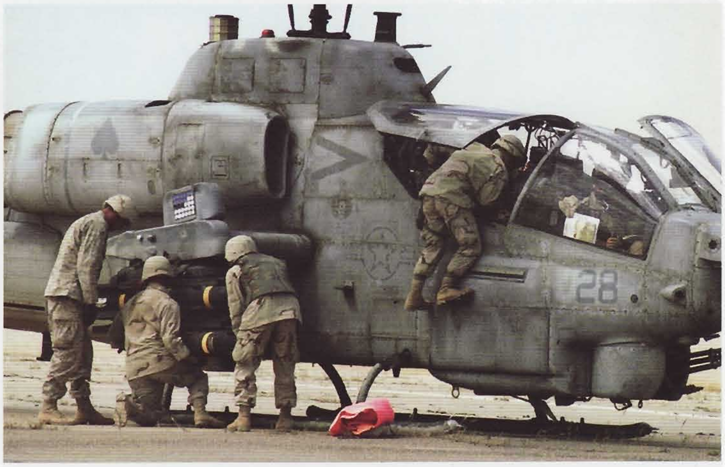


Another view of the same M1A1 as it drives through downtown Baghdad. "Lost Souls" is the tank parked obliquely across the median strip of the highway. Road wheel and track wear proved to be significant over the long distances and high rates of speed encountered in the campaign, and there was a high rate of suspension failure on #2, #3 and #5 left and right road arms and assemblies. After the campaign during vehicle turn-ins at Camp Fox, Kuwait, all of the tanks required new tracks to be fitted. (Sgt. Paul L. Anstine II, USMC)

These Iraqis look pleased to see Marines of MWSS-371 (Marine Wing Support Squadron). In the south of Iraq the population is mainly Shiite, a large segment of the population that was happy to see Saddam Hussein's Sunni regime toppled. The location is Qalat Sukar, and the Humvee gunner is manning a "Ma Deuce" M2 HB machine gun on 13 April. At the time a water treatment plant was being repaired to provide potable drinking water to the local people, and this Humvee contributed to the detachment's security. (LCpl. J. P. Sotelo, USMC)



Driving in the 'slow lane', M1A1 Abrams of Charlie Company, 1st Tank Battalion, make their way through the streets of downtown Baghdad. They are proceeding to an assembly area in order to be available as a QRF (Quick Reaction Force) on 14 April, the same day that the Pentagon declared major combat operations had ceased. (Sgt. Paul L. Anstine II, USMC)



Members of MWSS-373 refuel and reload the weapons of an AH-1W Cobra helicopter, referred to as "Whiskey Cobra" by Marines, at a newly established FARP. The photo was taken near Tikrit on 14 April. Marine Cobras were employed for ISR (Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance) missions in addition to CAS, and correspondingly were subjected to Iraqi ground fire. The AH-1W Super Cobra has a top speed of 320km/h, and can be armed with eight TOW or Hellfire missiles on its stub wings. (LCpl. Nicholous Radloff, USMC)

Tuesday 15 April

A group of seventy prominent Iraqis representing different political and religious groupings met at Tallil Air Base near An Nasiriyah. Their purpose was to begin discussing the future political direction of their country and to initiate the creation of an interim government for Iraq.

Marines of BLT 1/8, 26th MEU, defeated an attack by regime loyalists in the centre of Mosul. The situation had quickly deteriorated from a rock-throwing mob into a riot with hardliners firing small-arms at Marines. Marines worked with Mosul police to help restore calm in the city.

Wednesday 16 April

Lead elements of the 4th ID were heading north to take up responsibilities in areas north of Baghdad to relieve Marines and Special Forces there, even while their trailing elements were still arriving in Kuwait. In general terms the Army was to be responsible for all territory north of Baghdad, and the Marines for all territory south of the capital. There were 143,000 coalition forces in Iraq (122,000 U.S. and 21,000 U.K.) at this time. I MEF maintained a cordon around Baghdad, and cleared zones in the city center whilst conducting joint patrols with Iraqis.

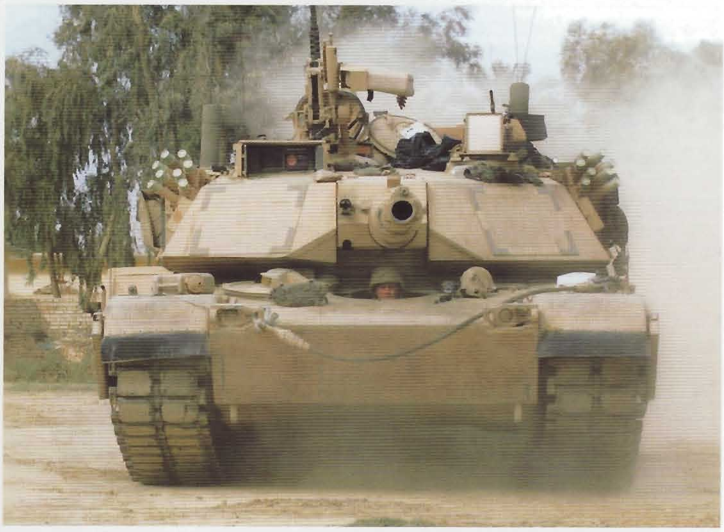
Units continued the process of securing Tikrit. In Mosul Marines killed between seven and ten civilians after another angry confrontation when armed members of a protesting crowd opened fire on Marines and attempted to enter their compound by climbing over the walls. Later these Marines would hand over responsibility of the city to the 101st Airborne Division.

Thursday 17 April

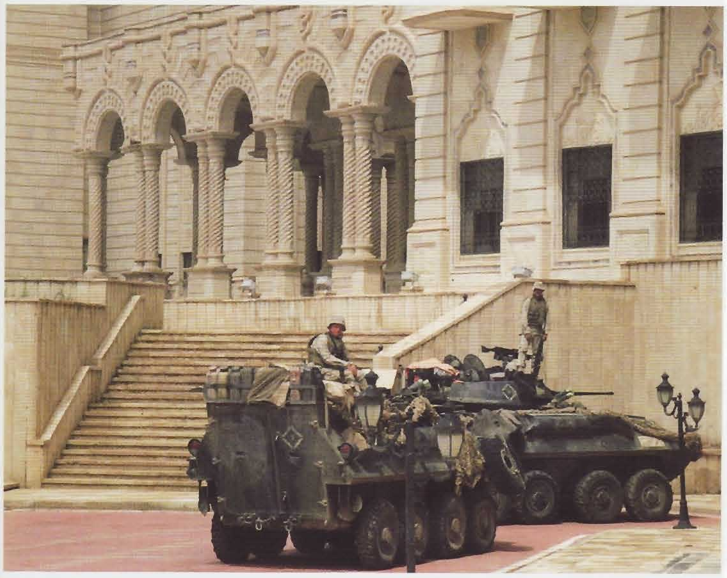
On this day OIF entered what was known as Phase IV, which emphasized SASO (Security and Stabilization Operations) rather than large-scale combat. The goal was to "win hearts and minds", to use a rather well-worn cliché.

Saturday 19 April

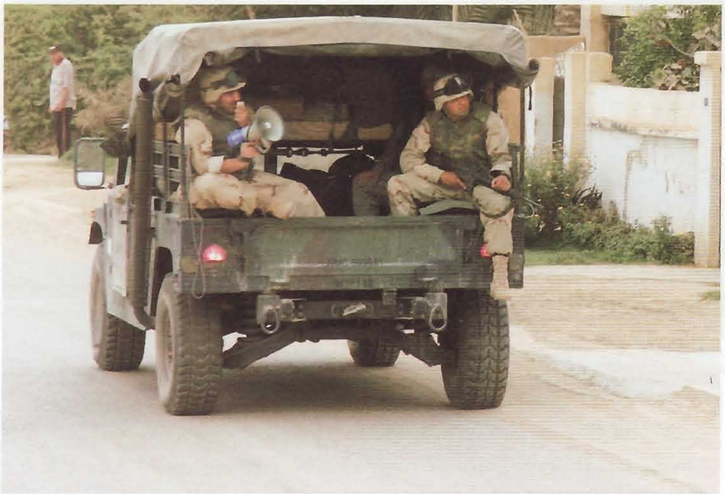
Patrols throughout Iraq sought to maintain security in selected locations along borders, main routes and in Baghdad, as well as to interdict regime members and paramilitaries.



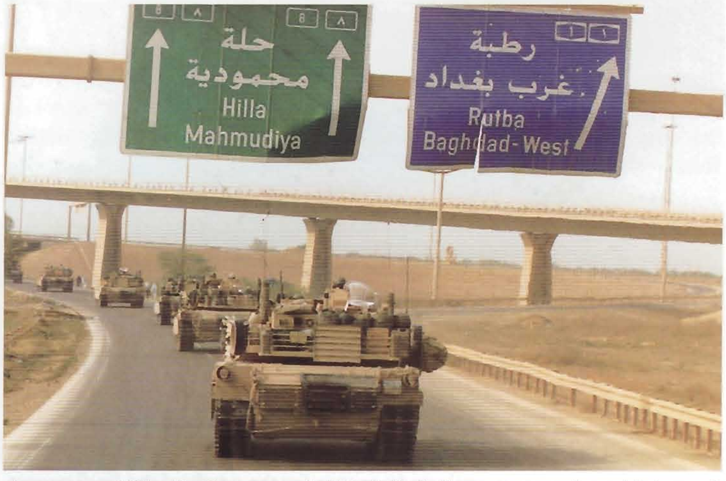
A frontal view of a powerful M1A1 Abrams as it moves into position near Baghdad on 15 April. All USMC M1A1 tanks are fitted with a minimum of two SINCGARS radios. XO tanks had an additional man-pack radio on board to communicate with supporting aircraft. (Sgt. Paul L. Anstine II, USMC)



Saddam Hussein's Tikrit Presidential Palace with some of its new guests on 17 April. These are LAVs of 1st LAR Battalion, with an LAV-25 farthest from the camera. The closer vehicle is an LAV-L, a logistics vehicle used for transporting supplies and ammunition. Three LAR battalions formed to become TF Tripoli to execute a 240km attack beyond Baghdad to Tikrit and Bayji. The nimble and hard-hitting LAR battalions were highly versatile throughout OIF, being used for screening the flank, or as attack, blocking or raiding forces. They also contributed greatly to stabilization operations after the cessation of the conventional attack. (LCpl. Nicholous Radloff, USMC)



On 15 April an Arabic-speaking member of 3rd CAG's Psyop Platoon sits in the back of a 'floppyback' HMMWV as it slowly drives through a suburban Baghdad street. He is announcing through a loudspeaker that EOD (Explosive Ordnance Disposal) personnel will shortly be detonating Iraqi ammunition nearby. (LCpl. Jennifer Krusen, USMC)



A convoy of Charlie Company, 1st Tank Battalion, passes along Highway 8 near the turnoff for Highway 1 on 18 April. The tanks are moving south to a new TAA (Tactical Assembly Area) to prepare for future operations. (Sgt. Paul L. Anstine II, USMC)

An M1A1 Abrams of Charlie Company, 1st Tanks, near Baghdad. An Abrams can mount up to three machine guns – an M2 .50-cal machine gun fitted at the CWS (Commander's Weapon Station), an M240 7.62mm machine gun for the loader, and an additional M240 coaxial MG mounted alongside the main gun. (Sgt. Paul L. Anstine II, USMC)

The date is 18 April, and this TWMP-equipped M1A1 from Charlie Company, 1st Tanks, rolls into a TAA outside Karbala. The "plow" weighs 4.5 tons and gives the tank a nose heavy attitude. Each USMC tank company is allocated, or "rates", four mine plows. As fresh follow-on forces arrived in Baghdad, Marines were ordered to move south to occupy a new AOR (Area of Responsibility) south of Baghdad. (Sgt. Paul L. Anstine II, USMC)

Marines were deployed as far north as Mosul. These are members of the 26th MEU securing IBN Sina Teaching Hospital in the northern city on 20 April. Visible in this photo is an IFAV entering the hospital gates. With its curb weight of 2,350kg and compact dimensions, the IFAV can be transported internally by both CH-47 and CH-53 helicopters. (TechSgt. Stephen Faulisi, U.S. Air Force)

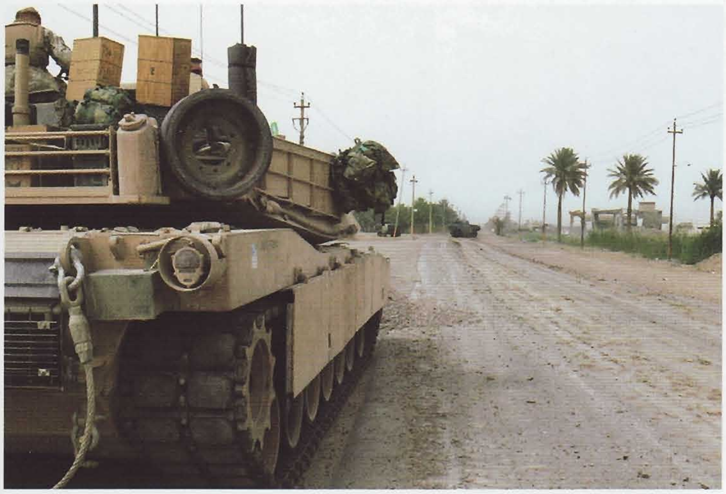
Sunday 20 April

Marines with machine guns and tanks guarded bank vaults that had been blasted open by robbers using RPGs. Army units of the 3rd ID took over policing duties in the Baghdad area and Marines handed over control of the city. By this stage there were 74,405 Marines and 9,501 Marine Reserves deployed in support of OIF. Incidentally 6% of all Marines in Iraq were female.

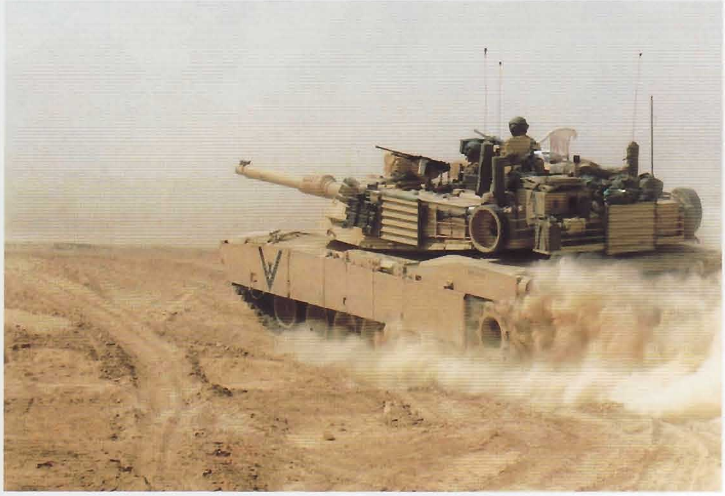
Monday 21 April

TF Tripoli turned over control of the Tikrit region to the 4th ID, and began their trek south. Marine elements were also departing Baghdad for their new AOR (Area of Responsibility) south of the capital, based around the main population centers of Karbala, An Nasiriyah and Al Kut. Marines mounted saturation patrols in their assigned territory to locate enemy hideouts and uncover stashes of weapons. At the same time they were carrying out civil missions, distributing water, food and medical services. This was a time when a smile and concern for the needs of the Iraqi people were of the utmost importance in ensuring a final victory. By now, war casualties amounted to 128 American dead (94 KIA and 34 non-combat related deaths), 31 British dead, plus two Americans missing.

In the town of Ash Shatra, Marines of MWSS-371 provide security. A gunner in this armament carrier variant Humvee stands ready with an M240G machine gun on 21 April. Note also that at this stage, no armored shields are provided for roof-mounted weapon stations, something that would change as the mission changed to SASO (Stability And Security Operations) and the insurgency intensified. (LCpl. Jonathan P. Sotelo, USMC)



In the foreground is a USMC M1A1 Abrams providing over-watch for the AAVs just visible in the distance. These latter vehicles are transporting soldiers from Kilo Company, 3/4 Marines, who are conducting a joint operation with the tankers of C Company, 1st Tank Battalion. The operation is taking place in Kharma on 22 April. (Sgt. Jose E. Guillen, USMC)



Another photo of "Lost Souls" on its way to Ad Diwaniyah on 24 April. The tank's EAPU (External Auxiliary Power Unit) can be seen mounted on the left side of the turret bustle rack. The EAPU is used to generate electrical power for essential tank systems without the need for running the "gas-guzzling" turbine engine. The XO tanks of 1st Tank Battalion each had a Marine aviator in the loader's position performing as a FAC (Forward Air Controller) in addition to those duties of a tank crewman. These FACs are normally assigned to a battalion staff while doing their one-year "ground" tours. (Sgt. Paul L. Anstine II, USMC)

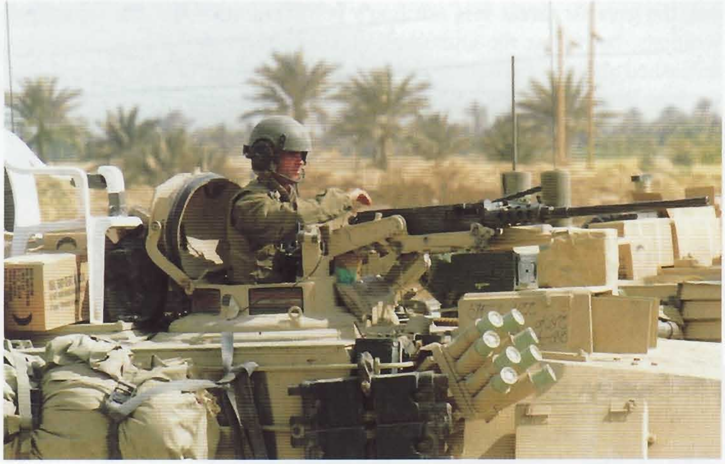
Thursday 1 May

In a dramatic display, President Bush landed on the carrier USS Abraham Lincoln off California's coast to announce the end of combat operations in Iraq.

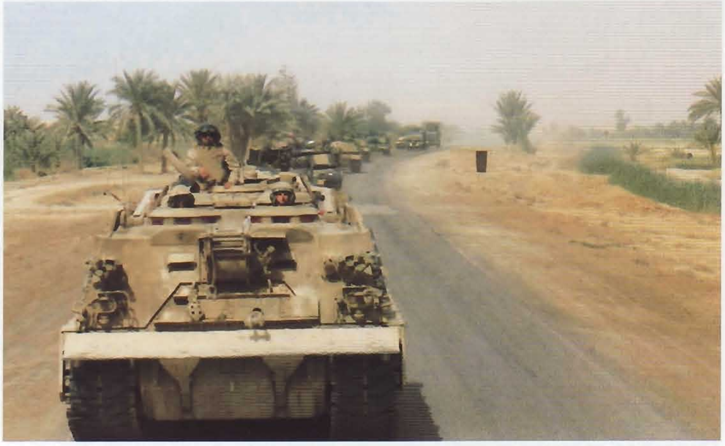
Subsequent weeks

While the battle may have been over, the war was really only just beginning. Although there had been a military victory, this in no way guaranteed a political or strategic victory. There was no decisive end to the war, and though most Iraqi forces gave up, not all did. The country was dangerously awash with weapons and munitions. In the vacuum left by the dissolution of Iraq's dictatorship, Ba'athists, *fedayeen*, foreign Islamic fighters and ordinary Iraqis quickly proceeded to mount a deadly and widespread insurgency.

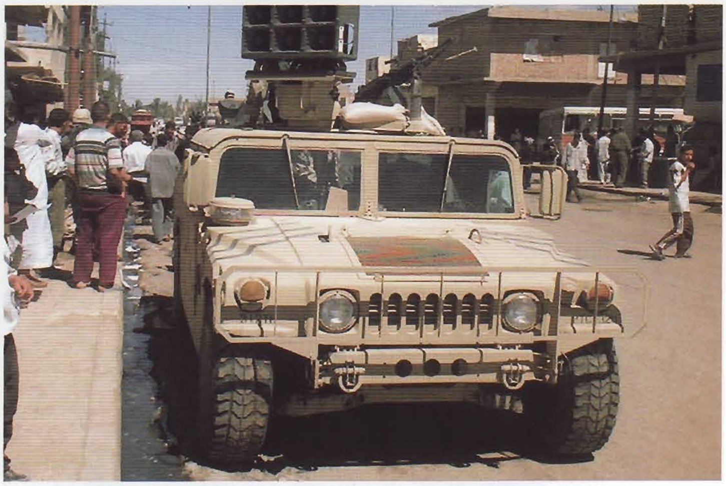
While the USA and UK had implemented and achieved a stirring victory on the battlefields of Iraq, it was evident that there were nowhere near enough boots on the ground to deal with the war's unforeseen aftermath. The pent up forces of revenge, relief and rivalry among the Iraqi people burst forth along religious, sectarian, ethnic, and tribal lines. As it turned



After assembling at a TAA at Karbala, Charlie Company of 1st Tank Battalion then moved on to Ad Diwaniyah on 24 April. This photo offers a view of the clutter of personal gear that characterized Abrams turrets. The white plastic chair carried on the turret of "Lost Souls" has suffered a broken arm by this stage of the conflict! This chair accompanied the tank all the way from Az Zubayr to Baghdad and beyond! (Sgt. Paul L. Anstine II, USMC)

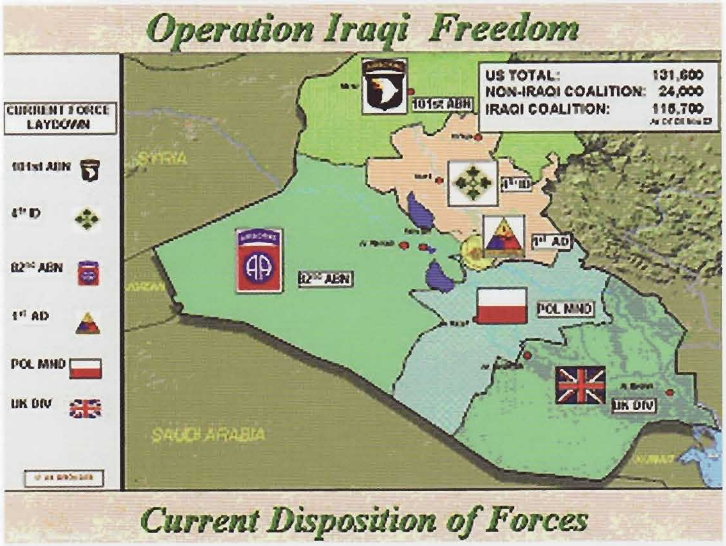


An M88A2 Hercules is part of the convoy of 1st Tanks' Charlie Company departing Karbala for Ad Diwaniyah on 24 April. Believe it or not, the name HERCULES is actually an acronym for Heavy Equipment Recovery Combat Utility Lift and Evacuation System! The M88A2 is capable of 40km/h when the going is good, and its engine provides an immense amount of torque. (Sgt. Paul L. Anstine II, USMC)



The location is a marketplace in a poor neighborhood of Al Kut on 2 May. Members of 350th Psyops Company pass out leaflets and broadcast important messages from the loudspeakers mounted on their HMMWV. By this time, SASO had become the primary concern in post-Saddam Iraq. Cleaning up countless tons of ammunition had also become a daunting task after major combat operations ceased. The Iraqi regime had weapons and ordnance stashed and accessible to the public in nearly every ditch, school, mosque, hospital, street corner, phone booth, tool shed and military installation in Iraq. (Sgt. 1st Class Donald R. Dunn II, U.S. Army) out, the greatest threat was not Iraq's perceived chemical and biological weapons, but rather the ambushes, suicide attacks and criminal activity unleashed after the Hussein regime was removed from power, and one that the War Department seemed to have failed to appreciate. There were to be no cheering and jubilant crowds to welcome Coalition soldiers and Marines. But for the most part, everyday Iraqis truly appreciated having the yoke of tyranny lifted from their shoulders and expressed an awkward "thanks" to those soldiers and Marines they came in contact with.

However, the striking tactical victory achieved by U.S.-led forces between 20 March and 15 April should not be overshadowed by the miscalculation of politicians in trying to achieve a lasting peace. Iraq was soon divided up into various AORs, but for now I MEF's part in OIF 1 was over. The Marines had once again proven faithful, and had an impressive list of achievements to add to their combat history. Units commenced their redeployment back to the USA and by the end of October 2003, the last unit had returned to its home base. Most would be returning the following February to begin what they called "Round 2".



Disposition of forces in OIF I after the initial assault ceased. By this time I MEF had already returned to the west coast of the USA. (Source: U. S. Department of Defense)

Returning home! A USMC Humvee approaches the ramp leading into the cargo bay of the military sealift command ship USNS Charlton. The date is 9 July, and USNS Charlton is moored at Port Shueiba in Kuwait. After I MEF's successful contribution to OIF, units were able to start redeploying back to home bases in the USA. (Photographer's Mate 1st Class Arlo K. Abrahamson, U.S. Navy)

Desert sands have already begun to cover this destroyed AAV hulk at Camp Fox in Kuwait in August. This vehicle was carrying Marines and Sailors of 1 /2 Marines, TF Tarawa, and was destroyed by friendly air-to-ground fire during the confused fighting at An Nasiriyah in March. It awaits transportation to a port before being loaded onto an MPS ship and taken to a scrap yard. (LCpl. Andrew Williams, USMC)

On 18 May, Marines from 1st Platoon, Charlie Company, 1/7 Marines, secure a bomb-making factory in Baghdad. The Marine near the camera carries a SAW, a weapon that uses the same 5.56mm ammunition as M16 rifles and M4 carbines. The 5.56mm round used by most coalition infantry rifles had no trouble knocking down enemy troops, especially if they were hit in the head or chest. The M249 has an effective range of 800 meters and an astounding rate of fire of between 700 – 1,000 rounds per minute, although gunners are trained to always fire in short controlled bursts. (Cpl. Michael J. Glowacki, USMC)

Appendix
USMC Order of Battle for OIF I[7]
(As at 1 May 2003)

I Marine Expeditionary Force (Reinforced) (TACON)

Marine Expeditionary Force HQ Group

* Command Element/11th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Task Force Yankee)
    - 2nd Battalion, 6th Marines (CP Security)
* 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable)
    - Battalion Landing Team 2/1
    - S/5-11th Marines (155T)
    - Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 161 (Reinforced)
    - Detachment/Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 361
    - MEU Service Support Group 15
* 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit
    - Battalion Landing Team 2/2
    - F/2-10th Marines (155T)
    - Detachment/Marine Attack Squadron 231
    - Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 263 (Reinforced)
    - Detachment/Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 269
    - Detachment/Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 772
    - Detachment/Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 461
    - MEU Service Support Group 24
* 1st Intelligence Battalion (Reinforced)
* 1st Force Recon Co (Reinforced)
* I MEF Force Liaison Element
* 6th Communications Battalion
* 9th Communications Battalion
* 1st Radio Battalion (Signals Intelligence) (Reinforced)
* 3rd Air and Naval Gunfire Liaison Co
* 4th Air and Naval Gunfire Liaison Co
* 3rd Civil Affairs Group
* Elements/358th Civil Affairs Brigade (USA)
* 402nd Civil Affair Battalion (TACON) (USA)
    - Displaced Civilian Team (USA)
* Detachment/9th Psychological Operations Battalion (Tactical) (USA)
* 19th Public Affairs Detachment (ADCON) (USA)
* 354th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment (OPCON) (USA)
* 367th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment (OPCON) (USA)
* HHD/468th Chemical Battalion (USA)
* D/86th Signal Battalion (Major Unit Support) (OPCON) (USA)
* C/40th Signal Battalion (TROPO) (OPCON) (USA)
* Interrogation/Debriefing Team/513th Military Intelligence Brigade (USA)
* Army Space Support Team 5, 1st Space Battalion (DS) (USA)
* 108th Air Defense Artillery Brigade (DS) (USA)
    - 2-43rd Air Defense Artillery (Patriot) (USA)
        - HHC/2-43rd Air Defense Artillery
        - A/2-43rd Air Defense Artillery
        - B/2-43rd Air Defense Artillery
        - C/2-43rd Air Defense Artillery
        - D/3-2nd Air Defense Artillery (TACON)
        - Platoon/7th Chemical Co (Bio Identification and Detection System) (OPCON) (USA)
    - 431st Chemical Det (JB, Augmentation for 24-hour operations) (OPCON) (USA)
    -208th Signal Co (Mobile Subscriber Equip Area Support) (OPCON) (USA)
    - Elements/3-124th Infantry (Patriot Security) (USA)
    - C/1-124th Infantry (Attached) (USA)

1st Marine Division (Reinforced)

* Headquarters Bn/1st MARDIV
* 1st Marine Regiment (Reinforced), (Regimental Combat Team 1)
    - HQ Co, 1st Marine Regiment
    - 3rd Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment
    - 1st Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment
    - 2nd Battalion, 23rd Marine Regiment
    - 2nd Light Armored Recon Battalion
* 5th Marine Regiment (Reinforced), (Regimental Combat Team 5)
    - HQ Co, 5th Marine Regiment
    - 1st Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment
    - 2nd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment
    - 3rd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment
    - 2nd Tank Battalion (Reinforced)
    - 1st Light Armored Recon Battalion
    - C Co, 4th Combat Engineer Battalion, 4th MARDIV
* 7th Marine Regiment (Reinforced), (Regimental Combat Team 7)
    - HQ Co, 7th Marine Regiment
    - 1st Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment
    - 3rd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment
    - 3rd Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment
    - 1st Tank Battalion (Reinforced)
    - 3rd Light Armored Recon Battalion
* 11th Marine Regiment (Reinforced)
    - HHB/11th Marines
    - Det/HHB 10th Marine Regiment (Radar/Maintenance)
    - 1st Battalion, 11th Marine Regiment (155T)
    - I/3-10th Marines (155T)
    - 2nd Battalion, 11th Marine Regiment (155T)
    - 3rd Battalion, 11th Marine Regiment (155T)
    - 5th Battalion, 11th Marine Regiment (155T)
    - R/5-10th Marines (155T)
    - 3-27th Field Artillery (MLRS) (USA)
* 1st Field Artillery Detachment (2 x Q37), 18th Field Artillery Brigade (USA)
* 1st Recon Battalion (Reinforced)
* 2nd Assault Amphibian Battalion (Reinforced)
* 3rd Assault Amphibian Battalion (Reinforced)
* 1st Combat Engineer Battalion (Reinforced)
* 2nd Combat Engineer Battalion (Reinforced)
* 2 x Platoons/323rd Chemical Co (Smoke/Decon) (Attached) (USA)
* 1/101st Chemical Co (Smoke/Decon) (OPCON) (USA)

3rd Marine Air Wing (Reinforced)

* Marine Wing HQ Squadron 3
    - Detachment/Marine Wing HQ Squadron 2
* Marine Air Group 11 (Reinforced)
    - Marine Aircraft Logistics Squadron 11 (Reinforced)
    - Marine Aircraft Logistics Squadron 14
    - Detachment/Marine Aircraft Logistics Squadron 31
    - Marine Aerial Refueler/Transport Squadron 352 (Reinforced)
* Detachment/Marine Aerial Refueler/Transport Squadron 234 (6 x A/C)
    - Detachment/Marine Aerial Refueler/Transport Squadron 452 (6 x A/C)
    - Marine Fighter/Attack Squadron 232
    - Marine Fighter/Attack Squadron 251
    - Marine Fighter/Attack Squadron (All Weather) 121
    - Marine Fighter/Attack Squadron (All Weather) 225
    - Marine Fighter/Attack Squadron (All Weather) 533
    - Marine Tactical Electronic Warfare Squadron 1
    - Marine Tactical Electronic Warfare Squadron 2
* Marine Air Group 13 (Reinforced)
    - Marine Aircraft Logistics Squadron 13
    - Marine Attack Squadron 211
    - Marine Attack Squadron 214
    - Marine Attack Squadron 223
    - Marine Attack Squadron 311
    - Marine Attack Squadron 542

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7 - This information is taken from "On Point – The United States Army in Operation Iraqi Freedom", released by the Center for Army Lessons Learned.

* Marine Air Group 16 (Reinforced)
  - Marine Aircraft Logistics Squadron 16
  - Detachment/Marine Aircraft Logistics Squadron 26
  - Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 263
  - Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 462
  - Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 465
* Marine Air Group 29 (Reinforced)
  - Marine Aircraft Logistics Squadron 29
  - Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 162
  - Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 365
  - Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 464
  - Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 269
* Marine Air Control Group 38 (Reinforced)
  - Air Traffic Control Detachment B/Marine Tactical Air Command Squadron
  - Marine Air Control Squadron 1 (Reinforced)
  - Marine Air Wing Communications Squadron 38 (Reinforced)
  - Marine Tactical Air Command Squadron 38
  - Marine Air Support Squadron 1
  - Marine Air Support Squadron 3 (Reinforced)
  - 2nd Low Altitude Air Defense Battalion
  - 3rd Low Altitude Air Defense Battalion
  - Marine Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Squadron 1
  - Marine Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Squadron 2
* Marine Wing Support Group 37 (Reinforced)
  - Marine Wing Support Squadron 271 (Fixed Wing)
  - Marine Wing Support Squadron 272 (Rotary Wing)
  - Marine Wing Support Squadron 371 (Fixed Wing)
  - Marine Wing Support Squadron 372 (Rotary Wing)
* Marine Air Group 39 (Reinforced)
  - Marine Aircraft Logistics Squadron 39
  - Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 169
  - Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 267
  - Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 268
  - Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 364
  - Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 369
* 498th Medical Co (Air Ambulance) (TACON) (USA)

I MEF Engineer Group

* 30th Naval Construction Regiment
  - Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 5
  - Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 74
  - Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 133
  - Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 4
  - Naval Construction Force Support Unit 2
  - Underwater Construction Team 2 Air Detachment
* 22nd Naval Construction Regiment
  - HHC/265th Engineer Group (USA)
    - 130th Engineer Battalion (Corps Wheeled) (USA)
    - 168th Engineer Co (Panel Bridge) (Attached) (USA)
    - 299th Engineer Co (Medium Ribbon Bridge) (Attached) (USA)
    - 459th Engineer Co (Medium Ribbon Bridge) (Attached) (USA)
    - 478th Engineer Battalion (Combat Mechanized) (USA)
  - SPO/Facilities Engineer Support Team-M (Return of Services) (DS) (USA)

2nd Marine Expeditionary Brigade (Task Force Tarawa)

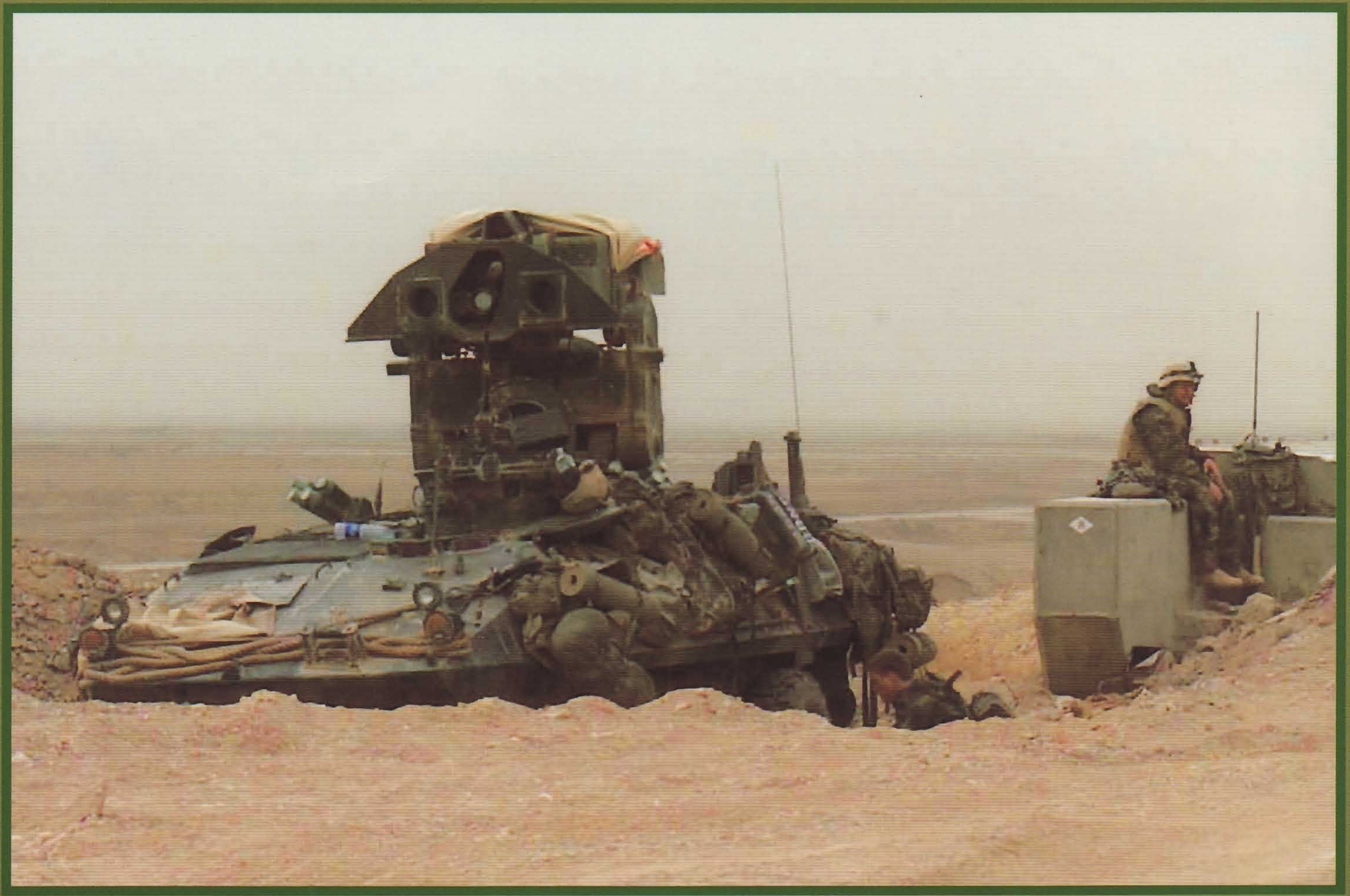
* 2nd Marine Expeditionary Brigade Command Element
* Detachment, II Marine Helicopter Group
* II MEF Liaison Element
* Co C, 4th Recon Battalion, 4th MARDIV
* Det/4th Civil Affairs Group
* 1 x Co Free Iraqi Forces
* 2nd Marine Regiment (Reinforced) (OPCON) (Regimental Combat Team 2)
  - HQ Co
  - 1st Battalion, 2nd Marine Regiment
  - 3rd Battalion, 2nd Marine Regiment
  - 2nd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment
  - 1st Battalion, 10th Marine Regiment (155T)
  - Co A, 2nd Combat Engineer Battalion
  - Co A, 8th Tank Battalion
  - Co C, 2nd Light Armored Recon Battalion
  - Co A, 2nd Assault Amphibian Battalion
  - Co A, 2nd Recon Battalion (Reinforced)
  - Combat Service Support Battalion 22 (AMPHIB EAST)
  - 2 x Platoons/413th Chemical Co (Smoke/Decon) (USA)

Follow On Forces

* 3rd Battalion, 23rd Marine Regiment
* 4th Combat Engineer Battalion
* 4th Light Armored Recon Battalion
* 2nd Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment
* Truck Co, 4th MARDIV

1st Force Service Support Group (FSSG) (Reinforced)

* Detachment /HQSVC Battalion
* 1st Dental Battalion
* 4th FSSG Forward (West)
* Combat Service Support Group 11
  - HQ/Combat Service Support Group 11
  - Combat Service Support Battalion 10
    - Combat Service Support Company 111
    - Combat Service Support Company 115
    - Combat Service Support Company 117
* Combat Service Support Group 13
  - HQ/4th Landing Support Battalion
  - Combat Service Support Company 133
  - Combat Service Support Company 134
  - Combat Service Support Company 135
* Combat Service Support Group 14
  - 4th Supply Battalion
* Combat Service Support Group 15
  - 1st Supply Battalion
  - Combat Service Support Battalion 12
  - Combat Service Support Battalion 18
  - Health Services Battalion
  - Combat Service Support Battalion 22
  - Combat Service Support Company 151
* 555th Maintenance Co (Patriot DS) (USA)
* Transportation Support Group
  - 1st Transportation Support Battalion
  - 6th Motor Transport Battalion, 4th FSSG
  - 7th Engineer Support Battalion (Reinforced)
  - 6th Engineer Support Battalion (Reinforced), 4th FSSG
  - 8th Engineer Support Battalion (Reinforced), 2nd FSSG
* 716th Military Police Battalion (USA)
  - HHD/716th Military Police Bn
  - 194th Military Police Co (Combat Support) (USA)
  - 977th Military Police Co (Combat Support) (USA)
  - 988th Military Police Co (Combat Support) (USA)
* 101st Chemical Co (Smoke/Decon) (OPCON) (USA)
* 1/51st Chemical Co (Smoke/Decon) (OPCON) (USA)
* 378th Corps Support Battalion (USA)
  - HHD/378th Corps Support Bn (USA)
  - 727th Transportation Co (Medium Truck Palletized Load System) (USA)
  - 777th Maintenance Co (DS) (USA)
  - 319th Transportation Co (Petroleum) (Attached) (USA)
  - Det 1/757th Transportation Battalion (Rail) (Attached) (USA)
* Preventative Med-Mobile Medical Augmentation Readiness Team 2 (TACON) (USA)
* Forward Support MEDEVAC Team (USA)



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